

CRAFTONOMICS:  
HOMO AESTHETICUS, HOMO ECONOMICUS, AND POIESIS

A Dissertation  
by  
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Submitted to the Graduate School  
at Appalachian State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 2014  
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program  
Reich College of Education

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## **Abstract**

### **CRAFTONOMICS: HOMO AESTHETICUS, HOMO ECONOMICUS, AND POIESIS**

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This empirical and discursive qualitative research project explores the complexities of engaging making practices with respect to well-being, economics, and education. The research engages narrative inquiry as a means of understanding the complex social narratives taken up by six avid makers as they engage their practices. This research is guided by a biopsychosocial constructivist epistemology in which meaning is situated in social and material contexts and aims to bring the complex social dynamics of making culture more into focus via the justification narratives makers use to engage making practices. The data revealed well-being narratives including concepts of self care, essence, appreciation, addiction, and the artist and economic narratives including an exploration of Homo economicus, maker time, gifting, and skill acquisition. In addition, this research develops and explores the theory that making practices are an extension of human well-being and contributes to a theoretical understanding of human art and craft production practice. This study also contributes a critical theory analysis of the interaction between human production practices and the economic metanarrative. Further, this study explores the relationship

between making practices and education which contributes to a theory of maker-based curriculum development along with a poietic educational aesthetic.

## **Acknowledgments**

I wish to express my gratitude to the many individuals who provided support and assistance in the completion of this work. First and foremost I want to thank my mother, Kalora, without whom I could not have completed this work. I would also like to thank my grandmother, Mama Miller for inspiring this subject. Both my mother and grandmother instilled in me the value of education, for which I am eternally grateful. I would like to recognize the contributions of my extended family, friends, and coworkers for their interest and encouragement during my journey. Also, I would like to extend a very special thank you to Eleanor and Eli who are the great work of my life and to Daniel for being my partner in this endeavor.

I extend deepest appreciation to my committee chair Kelly Clark/Keefe, and members Sally Atkins, and Robin Moeller, for their guidance and careful consideration of my dissertation through each and every phase of the work. I also acknowledge and appreciate the contributions of my research participants who were so generous with their practices and their time. While they remain unidentified in the writing, I will never forget their thoughtfulness and involvement with this work. Additionally, I would like to thank the members of Cohort 17, Susan, Wayne, Robin, Cama, Lisa, Jodi, Arshad, Jed, and Don for their friendship and the wonderful companionship through this journey. I would also like to give particular thanks to Jim Killacky, Kelly Clark/Keefe, and Vachel Miller for their friendship, guidance, and unwavering support throughout my time with the doctoral program and beyond.

Finally, I want to extend a special note of love and gratitude to my core four group, Sally Atkins, Susan Reed, and Katrina Plato, who have made my days brighter, my burdens easier to bear, and my heart ever larger. With big hands and a huge heart, I give deep thanks for our time together.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to my grandmother in eternal gratitude for teaching me how to live and to my children, Eleanor and Eli, in the hope that I will be able to do the same for them.



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## **Chapter 1: Researchable Issue**

This research project seeks to better understand the shifting landscape of human production practices in the United States. The early 21st century has experienced a renewed interest in craftsmanship and a fervor for do-it-yourself projects parallel to technological advancements in which tools have become more powerful, easier to use, and relatively cheap, making them more accessible (Hatch, 2013). This perfect storm of interest and resource has resulted in a maker cultural revolution. Maker spaces have become ubiquitous and are often integrated into schools, community centers, and corporate settings (Hatch, 2013).

This empirical and discursive qualitative research project explores the complexities of engaging in making practices with respect to well-being, economics, and education. The research employs narrative inquiry as a means of understanding the complex social narratives taken up by six avid makers as they engage their practices. My research is guided by a biopsychosocial constructivist epistemology in which meaning is situated in social and material contexts. This research aims to bring the complex social dynamics of making culture more into focus. In addition, this research develops and explores the theory that making practices are an extension of human well-being and contributes to a theoretical understanding of human art and craft production practice. This study also contributes a critical theory analysis of the interaction between human production practices and the economic metanarrative. Further, this study explores the relationship between making

practices and education, which contributes to a theory of maker-based curriculum development along with a poietic educational aesthetic.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this research is to investigate how making practices contribute to well-being and to explore the complexities of those practices with respect to cultural narratives, institutions, and policies. While educational goals are implicated in this research, the project focuses on the process of learning. Chapter five includes two possible modes of implementing making practices in classrooms as they exist now; however, further critical analysis of educational goals are warranted in future research. This research brings making practice narratives more into focus. As we navigate complex social and economic systems, we take up narratives to help justify and guide our practices and behaviors. This project explores those narratives among six makers through discursive social, cultural, and biological lenses in an effort to create a materially embedded cartographic rendering of the makers' positions as nomadic subjects (Braidotti, 2006). I explore the issues from the private and intimate arena of psychological well-being, the sociocultural perspective of educational policy and the global economic metanarrative.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions revolve around the three main issues of making practice in relationship to well-being, economics and education.

- How do making practices contribute to well-being?
- What are the complexities of engaging in making practices, especially with respect to discursive sociocultural narratives and the economic metanarrative?



- What are the perceptions held by makers about the role education has had or continues to have on their practices and beliefs related to art, craft, and making?

## **Making Practices**

The field of practice observed in this research project consists of a flexible continuum of making practices which moves between chore, craft, trade, and art. A making practice is not simply an art or craft practice. It covers a wider range of human production practices in which, as a result of labor and skill acquisition, there is a product such as a woven basket, or a moment in which an action is performed such as a musical performance. The continuum of a making practice ranges from behaviors commonly referred to as chores, trades, crafts and arts. Each of these is a type of making practice. Making practices may be artistic, may resemble traditional art or craft practice, or they may be more related to the use of technology to create products. For example, a maker may create a robotic vacuum cleaner or a robotic arm which retrieves sodas from the refrigerator. Making practices may also resemble domestic chores, such as gardening or baking. The maker cultural revolution is infused with technological advancements such as 3-Dimensional printing, coding, and programming, or digitally enhanced human production practices. The individual range for a maker is quite large. Makers sometimes resemble 18th century villagers in the simplicity of their tools and projects and sometimes appear almost super human with their technological capabilities. Maker is a conflated term which covers the wide range of human production practices.

## **Personal Connection**

I chose this topic because I am an avid maker and because I have a keen interest in the maker cultural revolution. Taking up a making practice has had a profoundly positive impact on my life. As a result of being a maker, I think I am more resilient, physically

healthier, and that I have a generally higher subjective well-being. As an educator, parent, and researcher, the nature of schooling is important to me, and I am anxious to explore how we might integrate making practices into educational environments. This research project will help shed light on the missed opportunities that maker culture has to offer educational settings.

I am invested in this topic because I am an ardent maker. I have not always been so. I spent many of my formative years in a consumer minded household engaged in traditional academic pursuits. When I left home for college, I knew how to purchase everything I needed. When I was 21 years old, I moved in with my grandmother and the world shifted beneath my feet. I felt, for the first time, that I was learning how to live. I began to realize that I had been living without having been taught what to do with my time. I had been spending all the hours of every day, and I had almost nothing to show for it.

My grandmother lives on the Blue Ridge Parkway and operates a campground that has been open for 45 years. At the end of every day, she can point to some form of accomplishment. My grandmother served as a behavioral model for me. She engaged in a wide variety of making practices that I imitated. She signed me up for her woodworking, painting, and basket weaving classes. We worked in her garden and continually built and rebuilt the world around us. Eventually, I began to develop the skills to live in a way that fulfilled me. I was awash with the many beneficial byproducts of the practices, in which I engaged. I developed a sense of community with fellow makers, an awareness of accomplishment as I mastered new skills, a feeling of control over my environment, and I often found myself in a state of total and deep concentration that was both rewarding and relaxing. My grandmother often says that woodworking is her therapy and digging is her

meditation. I hope to bring into focus the kind of lifestyle and practice I wish I had encountered earlier in my life and which lead me to a fulfilling lifelong practice. As a parent and a teacher, I work to include making practices in my curriculum and in the lives of my children.

Though I recognize the many profound gifts of being a maker, I sometimes feel pushed against an invisible boundary trying to justify spending time or resources on what many would view as wasted time and effort. On occasion, I resist the urge to make things. I wonder if my resistance to making is related to living within an economic environment in which resources are carefully controlled. I am interested in better understanding the relationships between production practice, well-being, and economics, and this research illuminates those issues and their many complicated interstitial spaces.

### **Global Perspective**

As we become an increasingly digital and global culture in which foreign labor is exploited to the advantage of the wealthy, we remove human production practices from our lives. Ultimately, we can buy things cheaper than we can make them, and making practices are often casualties of this economic reality. In the United States (US), suicide is among third highest cause of death for those aged 10-44 for which depression is a major risk factor (World Health Organization, 2014). According to recent research, making practices may help stave off debilitating depression and anxiety and help to reverse the conditions of those who suffer from depression and anxiety (Lambert, 2008). The reduction in human production practices resulting from our economic environment may have dire consequences with respect to mental health.

Additionally, the economic global order creates a production imbalance in which the world is divided among producer countries, such as Cambodia and consumer countries, such as the United States (Timmerman, 2009). Encouraging a maker revolution and becoming active producers of the goods in our lives helps to balance the inequity of third world exploitative mass production practices (Leonard & Conrad, 2010). The producer-consumer relationship of countries around the world often results in social injustice and lacks environmental integrity (Leonard & Conrad, 2010; Timmerman, 2009).

## **Education**

Critical theorists claim the US educational system has been hijacked by the economic global order and serves to reproduce the unhealthy behaviors that lead to depression, anxiety, economic degradation, and social injustice (Giroux, 2009). The neoliberal privatization of public spaces and “the capitalization and commodification of humanity [...] have resulted in the near global (if not universal) establishment of competitive markets in public services such as education” (Kumar & Hill, 2012, p. 1). According to this critical perspective, “for neoliberals, profit is God, not the public good” (Kumar & Hill, 2012, p. 2). While US Education policy clearly aims to create an economically productive citizenry, this research explores the possibility that we might engage education toward economic productivity without the often associated unhealthy caveat of depression and anxiety among students.

The shifting educational environment, along with unintended consequences of the US No Child Left Behind (NCLB) public school policy (Ravitch, 2011), have created a consistent decline in arts education and an ever-narrowing curriculum with waning extracurricular activities as schools scramble to keep up with subjects that are tested and thereby tied to funding (Hetland, Winner, Veenema, & Sheridan, 2007; Levine, Lopez, &

Marcelo, 2008). This study imagines the repercussions of implementing making practices in public schools spaces and curriculum despite the fact that they fall outside the purview of test-based accountability in NCLB education policy (Ravitch, 2011). One consequence of excluding making practices from public schools creates a narrative instilled in students from their earliest years that these practices are not important, when, in fact, they may be avenues for lifelong psychological resiliency and depression mitigation (Martell & Dimidjian, 2010).

Many arguments have been advanced for the continued development and prevalence of arts education programs. Researchers have attempted to make the case that arts education is important because it improves student performance in traditional and tested academic subjects (Hetland et al., 2007). Arts-based educational initiatives contribute academic goals perceived as more relevant, such as reading, writing, and arithmetic. For example, arts-based curriculum, in which students make things, leads to higher quality education and improves the problem solving capabilities of students (Hardiman & Rich, 2009; Hetland et al., 2007). This research seeks to move the conversation of making-based education beyond the additive instrumental argument traditionally put forth with arts-based initiatives. Making-based educational initiatives in public schools may contribute to relevant academic skills and help to remove some of the barriers to a beneficial lifelong making practice. Making-based education may be considered valuable not only because it helps students acquire other desirable academic skills, but also because it improves the quality of students' lives by providing valuable self-care tools among which psychological resiliency and depression mitigation are chief.

## Significance

In the last quarter of the 20th century levels of subjective well-being, commonly referred to as happiness, have been in overall decline in the US (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2004; Layard, 2005). Interestingly, white women have lost the greatest measures of subjective well-being since 1970 (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2004). Stevenson and Wolfers (2008) attempt to unpack the complex sociocultural decline of women's happiness with theories that may be related to the commodification of women's craft and domestic labors. Although income levels in the US (adjusted for inflation) have grown dramatically in the past 50 years, self-reported levels of whole life satisfaction are no higher now than they were in 1957 (Layard, 2005). Further, happiness has not simply plateaued as some behavioral economists report (Layard, 2005), but is actually in decline (Babington, 2007). A recent Italian study found that those living in the US are less happy today than their counterparts were 30 years ago (Babington, 2007). The study attributes the rise in unhappiness to longer working hours and deterioration in the quality of relationships with friends and neighbors (Babington, 2007). Behavioral economists, psychologists, social scientists, and culture experts conduct research in an effort to understand why subjective well-being is in decline and the complex interplay of factors contributing to this decline. While any decline in subjective well-being is riddled with many overlapping factors, the way we spend our time is likely a piece of the puzzle. As I conduct research, I wonder if lifestyle changes have resulted in reduced making practices and contributed to the gradual decline of subjective well-being.

Depression results in more workplace absenteeism than almost any other physical ailment (Murray, 2005). Preschoolers are the fastest growing market for antidepressants and

at least four percent of preschoolers are clinically depressed (Murray, 2005). The spread of this illness is epidemic and crippling. Western culture is in the middle of a quality of life crisis in which depression and anxiety disorders continue to rise (Lambert, 2008). The notion that human production practices may be linked to subjective well-being, yet disincentivized by the economic metanarrative, is important to explore in order to help lessen the decline of subjective well-being happiness and the ever-increasing rates of depression. Rampant consumerism may result in fewer gratification inducing behaviors. In an environment where we can buy it cheaper than we can make it, we are often discouraged from being active producers of the goods in our lives. I wonder if making practices are disincentivized through the consumer market, a circumstance which may contribute to lowered subjective well-being and reduced capacity for resilience.

## **Conclusion**

I engage this research project primarily as a researcher; however, I also engage as a student, an educational professional, an artist, crafter and maker, and perhaps most importantly, as a parent. I have children in the public school system. I hope that my children will be well educated, resilient, and prepared to meet the world they encounter. I am invested in helping create the best educational environment I possibly can for their benefit, for my own benefit and for the benefit of many others in the same circumstance. I also seek to better understand my own sociocultural discursive becoming as a parent, artist, researcher and teacher. I explore the experiences of others in search of insights which will help me make sense of my own experiences.

The remaining four chapters of this document contain a literature review, a methodology section, findings and analysis section and a conclusion. Chapter Two consists

of a literature review. The research topic crosses many disciplinary boundaries. It is important to look at making practices from historical, political, and cultural perspectives, especially in relationship to the chore-craft-art continuum (Adamson, 2010; Auther, 2009; Koplos & Metcalf, 2010; Shiner, 2001). Further this topic is related to subjective well-being and mental health literature including positive psychology (Seligman, 2004); happiness studies (Layard, 2005); flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990); expressive arts therapy (Knill, Levine, & Levine, 2005), neurological science of well-being and depression (Lambert, 2008), and social science related to well-being (Brown, 2010). In examining the sociocultural narratives to making practices, I have explored economic and education literature. I have investigated economic metanarrative literature (Haque, 2011; Michaels, 2011), issues of human capital and Marxism (Marx, 1908; Smith, 1776), behavioral economics (Ariely, 2008) and economics imperialism (Fine, 2000). I have explored educational narratives of making practices by exploring the impact of the economic metanarrative within public schools (Giroux, 2009; Ravitch, 2011), the importance and value of arts-education literature (Dewey, 1934; Eisner, 2002; Hetland et al., 2007) and the aims of education (Noddings, 2003). I have encountered vulnerability literature (Brown, 2010; Tangney & Dearing, 2002) in exploring the psychological and social barriers to arts and crafts practices. I continue to encounter issues of human production practices in the deep literature recesses and cultural and performative texts of my daily life, some of which have found relevance throughout the research process.

Chapter Three addresses the methodology for conducting research and includes information regarding data collection methods and analysis. From a methodological perspective, it has been important to explore literature surrounding metanarratives and



justification narratives and (Lyotard, 1984), a/r/tography (McNiff, 2004; Springgay, Irwin, Leggo, & Gouzouasis, 2008).

Chapter Four addresses the emergent narratives which makers use to construct and justify their making practices. I use narrative inquiry to explore the intersections of making practices with respect to well-being, economics, and education. The first section of Chapter Four address maker narratives and is divided into narratives which relate to well-being and narratives which relate to economics. The second section of the chapter four addresses making practices with respect to education. Chapter Five addresses the implications for this research and concludes the project.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This literature review moves through three interrelated sections. The first section defines the field of practice for making, explores the continuum of making practices through the art/craft binary of Western civilization, discusses crafts as a form of resistance in modern craft culture, and explores crafts in relationship to gender and Appalachian culture. The second section explores making practices as an extension of human well-being via the neurobiology of making, through the lens of positive psychology via psychological capital and social capital, and from the perspective of expressive arts therapy and behavioral activation therapy. The third section explores the sociocultural complexities of craft behavior within the economic metanarrative, educational policy and discursive social narratives. In conclusion, I present a conceptual framework for this research project in the form of craftonomics theory. The three preceding sections create a cross-disciplinary dialogue in theory building in which establishing theory and conducting social research are an intertwined process and are inseparable (Schram, 2006, p. 102). I built the craftonomics theory around the literature from the preceding sections and use the theory as the conceptual framework for this research project.

### **Craft Practices**

In defining the continuum of craft practice, I explore craft in a variety of contexts. I first discuss the art-craft binary from social and historical perspectives. I then discuss craft as commerce in the development of skilled trades. Next I move into anticapitalism craft

behaviors that explore a craftsman lifestyle. I further explore the fine line of craft as chore in which labor is often not rewarded monetarily. From there, I move into a discussion of craft practice among women in a market economy digital age. This section of the literature review concludes with a brief discussion of my own subjectivity as an Appalachian crafter, steeped in the Appalachian handmade traditions.

I refer to this field of practice as craft behaviors but investigate a slippery and flexible continuum of practice that moves between chore, craft, and art. For example, weaving a basket was once a chore, a requirement for moving eggs from the chicken coop to the kitchen table. It was a behavior engaged in order to make life more bearable, a virtual necessity. Later, basket weaving became a craft, not the high art of classical music or literature, but well beyond a necessary chore. Finally, we now see baskets assimilated into fine art museums as curators seek to honor the skill of indigenous or marginalized crafters (Shiner, 2001). The behaviors I want to study move along this continuum for a variety of reasons and those exhibiting the behaviors move as fluidly on a different continuum from laborer to skilled artisan to artist.

I recognize a wide swath of practices when I refer to craft behaviors. I would consider a huge list of behaviors including landscaping, baking, knitting, painting, woodworking, sculpting, writing, dancing, ceramics, and many other practices to be among the behaviors I am studying. These practices require varied levels of skill and produce a wide variety of products. Ultimately, I am interested in human making behaviors.

I rely heavily on Lambert's (2008) neurobiological exploration of human making to inform my ideas about craft behaviors. Lambert discussed human making behaviors as engaging both the hands (movement controlling striatum) and the mind (problem solving

prefrontal cortex), often resulting in activation of the accumbens reward-motivation center (Lambert, 2008). For practical purposes, I seek to study art and craft practices which result in product and require the application of skill. Though, the practices I study develop a product, my research is largely informed by the process of production practices.

I recognize that a discussion of craft behaviors as an extension of well-being is, in some ways, a uniquely western perspective imbued with privilege. In many parts of the world, including my native Appalachian region, craft behaviors are a form of necessary labor in which craft products are a delicate tether holding the often indigenous, disenfranchised population just above the gaping mouth of sometimes fatal poverty. It is important to recognize that performing craft behaviors in ways that contribute to well-being may be a luxury that does not exist in many parts of the world. I want to be cautious and aware of the deeply embedded social injustice that swirls along the liminal spaces of this research project.

**Craft as art.** When I discuss craft behaviors, I am speaking of the process oriented behaviors that result in a product designed and created by one person or one group of people. The uniqueness of personally designed and created products often conjures the label of art. While I believe that art and craft behaviors are similar, if not identical, I tend to use the term craft to encapsulate the behavior I am researching; however, the term art might be equally applied to much of my research. The process and product of craft behavior that I discuss engages a consumer cycle that focuses on services rendered as often as unique product creation. For example, often craft behaviors, when resulting in commoditized products, are solicited personalization designs such as the application of a monogram to a canvas bag. The monogram is not often considered to be art. However, the very same crafter might design

and digitize a logo which is later applied to a canvas bag. In the former case, the crafter is providing a rote service. In the latter case, the same crafter is called a graphic artist.

Shiner (2001) clarifies this issue in his discussion of the great 18th century division between art and craft. Prior to the 18th century, art and craft were interchangeable ideas; the terms “artist” and “artisan” could be applied equally to a painter or cobbler (Shiner, 2001, p. 5). The cultural shift which separated the artist-artisan into opposites, on the one side artists were creators of fine art worthy of prestige, and conversely, artisans were lowly craftsmen who made items that were merely useful, was complete and ubiquitous by the end of the 18th century (Shiner, 2001). Of course, any definition of art or craft is subject to the inherent limitations of over essentializing, reducing the complexity of a behavior into a manageable chunk. Behaviors and products are constantly redefining themselves and are always becoming. This analysis seeks to pin down definitions for the purpose of examining them, but also seeks to leave open the possibility of, and room for, alternative definitions and complexities.

An additional shift in the public response to art emerged as the concept of fine art grew in popularity (Shiner, 2001). Art became an “object of rapt attention” whereby art appreciation was infused with a contemplation model as opposed to the pre-18th century construction model (Abrams, 1958, p. 140). That is, art became something that humans separated out from daily life, something that was removed from daily experiences and placed in separate contemplative areas (like great music halls) for the general public to visit. The shift which elevated some forms of human making into fine art and demoted other forms of human making into craft further endowed the emerging 18th century aristocratic power relations and reinforced race, class, and gender lines (Shiner, 2001). Those human products

most often created by women, such as needle work and baking were considered craft, while behaviors more often engaged by men, such as sculpting and composing, were elevated to fine art status (Shiner, 2001).

Ironically, the same contemplation model of fine art which helped to create race, class, and gender privilege and prejudice by diminishing some human production as merely craft also allowed for the emergence of art as a form of social justice and art as an act of meaning making. It is the emergence of social justice ideals in feminist arguments which lead to the “overturning of the dungeon of domestic art” whereupon needlework and quilting began to spill out on to the main floors of art museums (Shiner, 2001, p. 7). The contemplation model of art both forced craft into something less than art and later became an engine for assimilating craft into a normative Euro-American fine art. Likewise, the multiculturalist movement began to see traditional African and Native American art grace the floors of fine art museums in the 20th century (Shiner, 2001). Shiner (2001) recognizes the problems inherent in reinforcing the Euro-American fine art ideal by assimilating cultural artifacts as a fine art norm; however, he fails to explore what impact the imperialistic claim might have on the craft behaviors of members of those traditionally marginalized groups. The assimilation of craft into the realm of fine art serves to remove craft behaviors from the hands of everyday people, reserving the behavior for artists who practice craft. That is, as craft becomes a fine studio art – potter becomes a ceramic artist, quilter a fiber artist, comic book writer a graphic novelist – it becomes something that ordinary people do not practice.

As the emergence of fine art began to shift the cultural narrative of humans as makers away from the pre-18th century artist-artisan maker and into the “artist’s vocation as a unique spiritual calling,” artists who achieved fine art began to emerge as a form of spiritual

investment created by heroic characters or geniuses (Shiner, 2001, p. 7). The direction of that shift necessarily limited human making behaviors (of the fine arts) in that there can only be a small number of extraordinary people in any given social setting. As we fight for museum floor space and recognition of craft as art, we further remove craft behaviors from the lives of human makers. If the goal of art making is to gain entry into a museum, and only a few fine artists are able to pass the coveted museum floor space test, then perhaps only those who show great talent early on will pursue the arts lifestyle. Those who feel certain they will not end up in a museum may not make art if the goal and purpose are entwined with entering a museum. While I am loathe to see craft collapse into the world of fine art, much of the academic discourse surrounding craft today is about its emergence within the field of fine art. With Shiner (2001), I long for “the more than 2,000 year period [of human history] when ‘art’ still meant human making or performance of any kind dedicated to a purpose and when the distinction between artist and artisan was not yet normative” (p. 9).

Roberts’s (2007) explores the notion of craft as an expression of art in his analysis of 20th century art as a triangulation of traditional artisanal skill, deskilling, and reskilling. Traditional artisanal skill classification of human making merges both fine art and craft in that it includes for example, both sculptors and basket weavers (Roberts, 2007). Deskilling is a term borrowed from Marcel Duchamp in which artists and crafters use ready-made item configurations towards artistic ends (Nesbit, 1986). Reskilling refers to the orchestration of multiple hands, as one might find in a symphony or film production (Roberts, 2007). Roberts (2007) writes about craft as contemporary art and is a prime example of the unfortunate conflation of craft into fine art.

The discourse around the craft as art movement effectively divides craft into fine art studio crafts (i.e., ceramic sculptors and fiber artists) on one side of the spectrum and crafters (i.e., potters and weavers) on the other side (Shiner, 2001). One section of the craft community ends up in high end art museums like the Whitney Museum or the National Museum of American Art. The other section of the craft community is made up of makers and crafters who reluctantly, if at all, self-identify as artists. They range from at home-only crafters to participants in renegade craft fairs to very active internet crafters in blogging communities and online stores. The division between art and craft is a deeply embedded oppositional logic in which craft is defined in its opposition to art. The first group, the studio artists, command exorbitant fees for their work, in part because they are not crafters. The second group, the crafters, create an affordable product at a price point the general public can meet in part because they are not artists. Often, the crafters do not sell their wares at all.

I am deeply troubled by the art-craft binaristic conflation. The Euro-American fine art narrative serves only to further remove craft behaviors from the daily lives of average people, behaviors which may contribute to higher quality of life. I am interested in the resiliency narratives and the production-practice sustaining narratives of the artists - crafters. I am interested in the ways in which crafters disrupt the art-craft binary and move into practice which function as both crafters and artists.

**Craft as commerce.** Behaviors, which at one time were considered mundane everyday experiences, have been “reconditioned by the techniques of capital” (Adamson, 2010, p. 458). As in the earlier basket example, the behavior of weaving a basket was once a necessary step in moving eggs from the chicken house to the kitchen table, but that same behavior today is often a commoditized skill or a trade. Adam Smith (1776) was the first



economist to discuss human behavior as a commodity in the late 19th century. Smith's (1776) analysis which sought to balance the cost of skills acquisition against a future profit gave rise to the modern notion of human capital and. The idea that skills are acquired at a cost (as an investment), and that we should seek a return on the investment, is deeply embedded in our economic metanarrative. The application of Smith's (1776) notion of human capital to craft behaviors is integral to my research. The economic metanarrative disrupts craft behavior by planting the idea that we need to recover our costs and capitalize on our skills.

**Resistance crafting.** An exploration of craft as a rejection of an economic metanarrative is not a new concept. The 19th century craftsman ideal of the Arts and Crafts movement arose in anti-industrialist response to the widespread mass production of goods; leaders such as William Morris argued that labor practices of the industrial revolution resulted in a division of labor that alienated and dehumanized workers, destroying, among other things, their happiness in daily work (Adamson, 2010). Craft, in this sense, was largely male and largely a debate about livelihood in an economic sense. Auther (2009) has written extensively about art, craft, and counterculture and discusses how the economic impact of mass production resulted in a livelihood (a way in which one earns money) which compromised a lifestyle. The upsurge of the Arts and Crafts movement began as a revolt against the division of labor that prevented one craftsman from seeing a product through from beginning to end; the product division of labor paralleled what Morris and other leaders of the movement felt “undermined the wholeness of the human being” (Auther, 2009, p. 36). Essentially, the Arts and Crafts movement was anti-capitalist and anti-consumerist; however, it was only anti-capitalist in the sense that Morris and other leaders advocated a return to

handicraft and quality in an effort to create consumer goods without sacrificing the dignity of labor or exploiting workers (Auther, 2009).

The four elements of the craftsman ideal of the late 19th century continued throughout the 20th century (Auther, 2009, p. 37):

- Craft rests in opposition to the dominant economic system and assumes anti-materialist and anti-consumerist tendencies.
- Craft is anti-establishment and encourages autonomy in relation to labor practices.
- Craft becomes a way of life and is considered restorative and, as a practice, engages a search for wholeness and personal meaning.
- Craft practice is considered to be both a path toward inward development and a process of discovery.

The counterculture of the 1960s -1970s also emphasized the anti-consumerist, anti-establishment elements of the craft way of life (Auther, 2009; Emery, 1977). Emery's (1977) landmark exploration of craft as a value statement instead of a design style embodied the west coast 1970s craftsman lifestyle move away from market economy and toward lifestyle and quality of life concerns. Craft lifestyle was considered an important cultural shift, "a solution to the dilemma of the existence of the whole person living within the machine society" (Emery, 1977, p. 2). Today we might make the same statement about our digital society.

The teachings that emerged from prominent craft schools such as the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts or the Penland School of Crafts echoed this sentiment through the work of crafters such as M. C. Richards, Paulus Berensohn, and Marguerite Wildenhain, among many others (Auther, 2009). The 1960s and 1970s brought about a renewed rejection

of the capitalist and increasingly consumerist attitudes of Western culture and craft became political in a whole new sense. The craft movement in the 1970s advocated a lifestyle and focused on the dignity in labor, just as the Arts and Crafts movement did in the early 20th century; however, the 1970s brought about a much more stringent anti-capitalist ideology and spurred many communal living cooperatives (Auther, 2009).

The oppositional character of the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s morphed into the marketing slogans of the 1980s whereupon organizations adopted the identity characterized by creativity yet devoid of opposition; the counter culture became culture (Auther, 2009). For example, clothing alterations made by punk rockers of the 1980s were quickly reproduced by manufacturers and sold in retail environments creating a simulacrum of cultural re-representation. What is more disturbing, the creative lifestyle inspired by craft revolution must find a way to flourish in an economic environment. Renegade craft fairs and craftsters across the United States are now rising again in resistance to economic imperialism in search of a creative lifestyle, yet forced up against the commodification of their wares which risks trivializing labor (Levine & Heimerl, 2008). Further the new craft culture is in tension with corporations in which craft identity is always being co-opted and reproduced and perverted in market economies, often at the expense of sweatshop labor (Levine & Heimerl, 2008; Spencer, 2007).

Where does this sordid history leave craft behaviors today? Auther (2009) suggests that the resistance of the traditional opposition of crafting creates a “discourse of meaningful work, community, or an integrated lifestyle that is flattened and made trivial through commoditization” (p. 44). Perhaps crafters, who are deeply involved and committed to a market economy consumer culture, engage craft behavior, adopt the lifestyle of freedom and

self-expression, and then attempt to enable that freedom via the commoditization of the craft product? The process becomes overshadowed by the product. Craft behaviors exist in many economic spaces, from designing a onesie for one's child, to creating a gift for a baby shower, to selling a wooden stool at an arts and crafts festival, to displaying in fine arts museums. While my inclination is to lean toward crafters who focus on process and live a crafts lifestyle, I intend to examine craft practices across this behavioral continuum and do not intend to limit my study to one realm of craft behaviors.

**Craft as chore.** The line between craft and chore is for me often imperceptible. As I explore craft behaviors, I may look at behaviors which fit into the popular culture definition of craft such as woodworking, sewing, knitting, blacksmithing, weaving, and ceramics. However, I also look at behaviors that reside in the interstitial spaces of the craft-chore continuum. For example, gardening, baking, and auto body repair are activities which migrate toward chore in the behavior continuum, but which would also satisfy the conditions I have defined as a making practice. Lambert (2011) explores the commonly held but perhaps faulty belief that “we experience a more pleasurable lifestyle by hiring others to do our work-cut our grass, cook our food, clean our houses” (p. 53).

**Women's work.** Craft practice intersects with economics, gender construction, domesticity, and home making in an interesting way. In an economic metanarrative culture, time and again we compliment one another's labor with the oft heard refrain, “you should sell those.” It implies that a practitioner's labor has value, the only sort of value market economy cultures consistently measure, economic value. My research focuses on the craft practice of women. While craft practice is certainly important for men and while my argument about craft practice as an extension of well-being extends to humans beyond any

caveat of gender construction, I have limited this study to the exploration of women.

Traditionally, much of craft practice, especially surrounding the domestic arts, has been considered a female domain, and in this digital age, there is a tsunami of female craft practice on the internet.

Craft blogs have brought domestic private spaces into the public domain and the digital public space remains gendered. For example, the popular social networking site, pinterest has emerged as a crafting Mecca and is dominated by women users (Jurgenson, 2012). When similar behaviors are attributed to males, they are often referred to as trade instead of craft, no doubt an indication of capital enacted upon age old heads of household. Interestingly, the fact that Pinterest is largely female user generated content is often the lead in technology stories about the site; whereas, Wikipedia, which is largely male user generated data, is rarely discussed as being a male space (Jurgenson, 2012).

Knitting in public has been compared to breastfeeding in public (Higgins, 2005), in that both acts “are intensely productive and have generally contributed to women’s heretofore invisible and unpaid labor” (Bratich & Brush, 2011, p. 237). Essentially, a trade is a practice monetarily rewarded; whereas, a craft is often either aesthetically pursued (i.e., a domestic art) or considered a household chore and the terms are, unfortunately, gendered via an economic lens. I anticipate my research addressing issues of household income in which craft practitioners often deplete familial resource in order to produce crafts and then seek to recover lost wages via the sale of crafts online or at local venues.

The economic role of the housewife and the technological development of “Mommy bloggers” certainly plays a role in this research. The annual Blogher 2012 New York City conference boasts a mission to create opportunities for women who blog to pursue, among

other things, economic empowerment (Camahort, 2012). Blogs create an economic platform to sell individual items, but also, blogs provide an opportunity for bloggers to commoditize their entire lives. In the *New York Times* article, “Honey, Don’t Bother Mommy: I’m Too Busy Building My Brand,” Mendelsohn (2010) discusses the complicated world of monetizing a blog to create a revenue stream. Mommy bloggers create an image of domesticity and femininity and it is for sale. The emerging 21st century Do It Yourself (DIY) domestic cultural construction traverses and troubles the world of craft practice.

According to the Pew Research center, there are 18.9 million women who write blogs (Faw, 2012). According to a 2009 study by BlogHer, iVillage, and Compass Partners, 23 million women read, write or comment on blogs weekly (Mendelsohn, 2010). Of women bloggers, 74% have children 18 or under living at home (Scherer & Kramer, 2012). The most commonly blogged about topics include family and parenting, lifestyle, crafts, DIY, food, and product reviews (Scherer & Kramer, 2012). Certainly the blogosphere is an opportunity for women to redefine themselves as consumers and to renegotiate gender construction, and craft practice is deeply involved in these negotiations. My study helps illuminate these issues.

**Appalachian craft.** My family has lived on the same Appalachian farm since the early 1800s. I am deeply rooted in both Appalachian culture and Appalachian craft practices. Certainly, my experiences frame this discussion of craft behaviors in ways that I am constantly discovering. One way that I see my Appalachian heritage framing my argument is through a deep emphasis on self-sufficiency instilled by my parents and grandparents. Further, my grandmother, with whom I have lived much of my adult life, is wedded to the idea that working is fundamentally healthy and that accomplishment is essential for well-

being. She often says working is one of the greatest joys in life and that we are too quick to wish it away; however, the type of work she refers to is life sustaining work (e.g., gardening, repairing fences, preserving food). She is deeply saddened that people have become so removed from what it takes to actually live. She presents an image of the sad city folk, who type numbers and talk on the phone all day long and cannot identify the source of their food. It is worth noting that my grandmother is a painter who has created hundreds if not thousands of images of Appalachian life and culture. She is an avid and celebrated basket weaver and wood worker as well. She is also a horticulturalist.

The set of traditions that reside within Appalachian craft practice is distinguished from the broader classification of United States art in that art forms emerge from folk life traditions, sometimes heavily based on ceremonial significance, deeply embedded in handicrafts, and often infused with a deep sense of connection to the land and story-telling (Fariello, 2006). Appalachian art is complicated for me by its relationship to commercial success. Appalachian folk tradition is “work that emanates, for the most part, from a private, authentic, and aesthetic impulse well removed from commercial intent” (Fariello, 2006, p. 1412). This is the type of art that my grandmother practices. Ironically, the most celebrated art to come out of the region is that same handicraft (i.e., quilts, baskets, and musical instruments; Fariello, 2006). My exploration of the impact of the economic metanarrative on craft behaviors arises in part out of a furious violation of that authentic, aesthetic impulse in which artists and crafters are essentially commoditized as a performance of capital and commercialized in service of a Western cultural identity (Fariello, 2006). A national interest in folk art emerged in the early 20th century driven in part by a desire to establish a national identity (Fariello, 2006).

My understanding and exploration of craft behaviors is suspended *with* an inherent tension between my Appalachian identity as a crafter and my academic identity as an artist, researcher, and teacher. I occupy a hybrid space as both a crafter and an artist. Further, I identify as Appalachian, but I do so with a critical eye, an academic perspective which recognizes that being Appalachian is a social construction.

### **Making Practices and Well-being**

In this section of the literature review, I present a transdisciplinary theory about how craft practices contribute to well-being. I discuss the beneficial aspects of craft practice via behavioral biology, positive psychology, and expressive arts therapy. The perspective of craft behaviors as essential for mental health and well-being is a result of the careful application of many different conceptual lenses. This literature review explores craft behaviors from the perspectives of neurobiology, psychology, and sociology; however, not only do these lenses often overlap, but also many other lenses bear credence to the theory that craft behaviors are not only beneficial to but perhaps even essential to subjective well-being, mental health, and physical well-being.

**Behavioral biology.** In this section of the literature review, I first explore behavioral biology as a discipline and then move into discussing two specific domains within the discipline, effort driven rewards and the physiological benefits of craft behaviors. Behavioral biology is an emerging discipline and is often referred to by many other names including evolutionary psychology (Pinker, 2002), behavioral ecology (Krebs & Davies, 1978), ethology or species-centrism (Dissanayake, 1992). While each of these disciplines carries with it fine distinction, they all apply to my exploration of craft behaviors within the



economic metanarrative. I think it is valuable to understand the environment to which early humans adapted in attempting to understand our behavior. In the study of human behavior:

It is worth emphasizing how long we were “feral” or “natural,” and how recently we have been domesticated into separate cultures. As animal taxa go, hominids are quite recent, becoming distinct only about four million years ago. But 39/40ths of that four-million-year period, during all of which time we were gradually “evolving,” we inhabited essentially the same environment and lived in essentially the same way, as nomadic, savannah-dwelling, hunter-gatherers in small groups of twenty-five or so. (Dissanayake, 1992, p. 4)

Ethology is typically used in zoology to study the behaviors of non-human animals; however, Ellen Dissanayake (1992) uses ethology to study human art behaviors.

Dissanayake’s (1992) exploration of art behaviors is the study of essentially the same behavior that I refer to as craft behaviors, and henceforth, I will use the term art - craft behavior when referencing Dissanayake’s (1992) research and in reference to the pre-18th century concept of human making in which art was not favored over craft (Shiner, 2001). It is easy to imagine art-craft behaviors as a modern frivolity, a result of excess leisure time created by efficiency among humans, especially when thinking of modern fine art. However, a behavioral biology view reveals that art-craft behaviors evolved very early among *Homo sapiens* and certainly before leisure time was prevalent (Dissanayake, 1992). The ubiquity of art-craft behaviors in human culture is an indication that “an important appetite or need is being expressed” (Dissanayake, 1992, p. xiii).

At least some behavioral scientists may have failed to recognize art as universal and biological because, like the larger society to which they belong, they consider art to

be either totally useless or something created in the service of sociopolitical ends [; however,] far from being peripheral, dysfunctional, trivial or illusory, the arts have been part of human beings' most serious and vital concerns [, and] if they are not so today, we should perhaps look for the reason not simply in some flawed metaphysical status of the concept of art but rather in the way we live. (Dissanayake, 1992, pp. xiii-xvi)

Grosz (2011) explores the behavior of animals in an effort to infer about human behavior and concludes that art behaviors must be a result of sexual selection instead of natural selection because art behaviors are “extravagant, often useless, sometimes imperiling qualities that have no survival value but nevertheless continue in abundance” (p. 170). Theorists and researchers commonly address art as having little or no value beyond the social (Dissanayake, 1992; Winner, 1982). One of my central arguments is that art *does* have biological survival value. Dutton (2009) makes a strong argument that art has no evolutionary advantage, because, in order for an evolutionary explanation to be viable, it necessarily requires a biological concept of adaptation. Dutton (2009) further argues that, the prevalence of art behaviors suggests that the art instinct is a *by-product* of an evolutionary advantage. According to this argument, art behaviors are what Stephen Jay Gould refers to as “spandrels” or “nonadaptive side consequences” of evolution (Dutton, 2009, p. 92). Lambert's (2008) work around depression and the effort-driven rewards circuit suggests that art behaviors may be more than spandrels of human evolution. Art and craft behaviors may be fundamentally important support systems for psychological well-being and the absence of psychological well-being has dire physiological consequences (via stress and anxiety) in which the stress hormone cortisol increases, causing a heavy allostatic load on humans and a

multitude of disease descends upon us (e.g., heart disease, cancer, obesity, diabetes; Lambert, 2008). In this case art and craft practice may serve both a social and biological function. We may even begin to refer to art behaviors as mind-body behaviors. This argument helps to disrupt the binary of nature-nurture or social-biological.

We evolved to live in an environment very different from the one we currently inhabit and “given the mismatch between the speed of technological development and human evolution, the same instincts and abilities that once helped us now often stand in our way” (Ariely, 2010, p. 8). In the same way that our bodies evolved to give us extra time to consume calories before signaling a full belly in order to cushion for the times when food was scarce, our bodies may have evolved in other ways that are now incompatible with our lifestyles (Ariely, 2010). Similar to the abundance of calorie rich foods at our disposal leading us headlong into an obesity and diabetes epidemic sometimes referred to as “diabesity” (Taubes, 2011, p. MM47), so too may the economic metanarrative of our culture impact craft behaviors with unintended consequences such as the tendency toward lowered subjective well-being. The corrective behavior for an excess of calorie rich foods is either to fight the urge to consume too much or to increase exercise. Perhaps there are behavioral antidotes to the depression and decline in subjective well-being that modern Western culture now faces as well.

It is important to explore how humans spent the first 3,900,000 years in order to understand the potential importance of craft behaviors. Every society of human beings in recorded history practices at least one form of what Western civilization refers to as the arts “and for many groups engaging with the arts ranks among the society’s most important endeavors” (Dissanayake, 1992, p. xiii). The prevalence and selective value of the arts in

human culture function *at least* to aid in sexual selection, to enhance communication, to serve as a means for individual display, to provide identification, to provide prestige, to aid the development of cohesive communities (Dissanayake, 1992). As Shiner (2001) notes, the arts were often not removed as objects of attention but instead were embedded within the social contexts of lives.

Unlike living in modern Western culture, it took a lot of effort for early humans to survive, much less thrive. Today survival is all but guaranteed for the majority of westerners; however we are experiencing an emotional failure to thrive in the stagnation and decline of subjective well-being coupled with ascending depression rates (Babington, 2007; Lambert, 2008; Layard, 2005; Murray, 2005; Seligman, 2004). It is intuitive that early humans who made things improved their chances for long and fruitful lives. It is easy to imagine that groups who made bowls as opposed to eating off the ground or from rocks may have been less likely to contract diseases and more likely to optimize nutrition. Likewise creating a spear or fashioning a primitive knife was almost certainly more effective for hunting than using our bodies alone. It is also easy to see how some behavioral biologists or evolutionary psychologists conclude that humans developed a rewards system to encourage behaviors that lead to survival, longevity, or increased the chances of reproduction (Dissanayake, 1992; Lambert, 2008; Smith, 2002). Essentially, humans who made things were more likely to survive and reproduce. The process of natural selection encouraged brains that (neurochemically) rewarded human making behaviors. We now live in a time where making things is difficult (economically and socially challenging, lack of skill acquisition). Unfortunately, our brains are hardwired to make things, and the lack of the behavior results in depression, anxiety and physical decline (Lambert, 2008). My research

explores the economic, educational, and social barriers to this fundamental, evolutionarily derived human production behavior.

As science advances, we see how deeply interrelated physical and mental well-being are, and it may be more appropriate to speak about a mind-body well-being than it is to explore mind and body as separate entities with separated elements of well-being (Lambert, 2008). I use the term mind-body in the Buddhist sense in which mind and body are inseparable and interdependent (Lama, 2006).

***Effort driven rewards circuit.*** Neurologist Kelly Lambert (2008), in studies related to depression, began a search for a neural circuit explaining neurochemical rewards for behaviors which engage both the hands, via the movement controlling striatum, and the mind, via the problem solving prefrontal cortex. Lambert (2008) identified a neural circuit (*accumbens-striatal-cortical circuit*) which she refers to as the effort driven rewards circuit in which neural activation ends in the accumbens reward and motivation center. Lambert (2008) suggests that using our bodies and minds to produce meaningful goods is the neurological equivalent to our brains awash in natural anti-depressants. Lambert's (2008) theory is that "our brains evolved to acknowledge and reward the fruits of our ancestor's labors;" however, it is unclear as to whether our brain function rewards only the fruits of the labor or simply rewards the labor (p. 38). Lambert (2008) fails to extend the conversation into a complex analysis of the fruits of our labor. When applying the logic of evolutionary adaptation, it doesn't make a lot of sense to reward only for the fruits of labor when oftentimes the fruits are dependent upon skills acquired over multiple attempts. It would make more sense to reward the attempts in addition to rewarding the successful fruits or

gains. While this argument may seem trivial or semantic, it becomes very important in discussing the impacts of craft behaviors on the mind - body.

In this sense, cognitive labor is very different from physical labor. Almost all physical labor, in some way, involves the hands and mind, or the whole body. Lambert (2008) explores the role that hands have played in human evolution and establishes “the use of our hands to manipulate our environment, especially to produce tangible rewards that we can see, is consistent with our brain’s evolutionary trajectory and even today helps us sustain active, well-functioning lifestyles” (p. 81). Further, any diminishing of “the activity of these brain-rich hand movements would have dire consequences, including decreased motivation, reduced pleasure associated with our efforts, and less effective problem solving abilities—all symptoms of depression” (Lambert, 2008, p. 84). Finally, behaviors which maximize hand use, including the use of arms, wrists, and fingers, may be the most efficient method of rebooting the effort driven rewards circuit (Lambert, 2008). While the physical use of our hands is critical in engaging the effort driven rewards circuit, it is also necessary to utilize cognitive labor by activating the problem solving prefrontal cortex (Lambert, 2008). That is, working at an assembly line all day in a fashion that doesn’t require problem solving is likely to activate the EDR neural circuit to a much lesser degree than knitting a complicated pattern.

Effort Driven Reward inducing behaviors exist on a continuum. Some behaviors engage us more fully and are more rewarding, while other behaviors may stimulate us to a lesser degree but still offer some reward (Lambert, 2008). Other contributing factors are also in play. People experiencing negative life events, excess stressors, illness, or a host of other problems may experience differing degrees of reward for behaviors (Lambert, 2008). A person in the deep throes of depression may require intervention in order to kick start the

EDR neural circuit. This research is new and constantly developing. Finally, the human body is amazingly adaptive and this system is certainly no exception in its potential flexibility. It does, however, seem clear that being physically engaged in the world is beneficial in multiple ways and it is logical to explore the barriers to our fully engaging physically in the world (Lambert, 2008).

***Physiological benefits of craft behaviors.*** Many studies suggest that chronic stress has negative impacts on the biological and psychological state of human beings (Lambert, 2008; McEwen, 2000; Seyle, 1976). Among other things, stress results in “cardiovascular disease, diminished immune functions, depression and anxiety disorders, diabetes, and gastrointestinal illness” (Lambert, 2011, p. 85). Lambert (2011) argues that the toxic effect of stress is one of the most important discoveries of the 20th century, and ever more so, given that depression is on the rise. McEwen (2000) writes about the importance of allostatic load, which refers to the body’s ability to maintain stability to effectively respond to stressful situations. The ease with which we switch from a high stress moment back to a regular moment determines the allostatic load we carry. If your heart rate takes hours to return to normal after a stressful event, you experience increased allostatic load, and your cardiovascular health takes a hit. Unfortunately, much of the stress experienced in modern life is chronic stress related to issues such as finances or time debt which are not easily escaped (Sapolsky, 2004). Human production behaviors (crafts) become useful coping strategies during times of chronic stress as they activate the effort driven rewards neural circuit which allows us “to continue experiencing pleasure in the midst of stressful times” (Lambert, 2008, p. 100).

For example, my grandfather died in the heart of a very cold winter. My family had been sitting by his bedside for weeks when he finally passed. We had all been barely breathing waiting for his time on earth to come to an end. When his time came, there was immediacy about everything. Before the first day without him was over, we had begun construction on a ramp to help shuffle the elderly into the top of the barn for his funeral, we were sewing curtains and table cloths, we were moving furniture out of the barn, we were choosing his grave site and began digging, we were crafting elegant displays of his life for viewers. We were working together, laughing, crying, and coping very effectively. We all missed him tremendously, yet those first few days he was gone are full of great memories for me. I photographed the whole event and mourners who stopped by never ceased commenting about our industriousness. There was a feeling of joy just under the grief. While it's difficult to discuss in a way that seems socially acceptable, it is exactly this type of reward, accomplishment, and engagement that leads to resilience in hard times.

It is possible to make the argument that almost all people experience chronic stress in the economic metanarrative we inhabit. For the vast majority of people, there is really no such thing as financial security. Even those of us with hefty retirements are often tethered to stock portfolios which can crash or subject to investments that may turn out to be invisible financial bubbles. Even in circumstances of relative financial security, we maintain a narrative of instability which causes people stress. The terminology we use such as the word crash, is an indication of the taken for granted belief system that our economic structure could come tumbling down with little warning. The economic metanarrative assures us that our economic circumstance is of strong importance and that it is constantly uncertain. In addition to the anxiety-inducing pursuit of elusive financial security, we are faced with scores



of other stress inducing conditions of modern life including the daily news, an endless stream of advertisements and information, and major life events such as graduation, weddings, births, and deaths. This daily chronic stress is often more damaging than the moments of extreme stress (i.e., the death of a loved one) which are more short-lived (Lambert, 2008). Chronic stress and depression lead to multiple neuronal interruptions including a halt to neurogenesis, the creation of new neurons in the hippocampus (Gould as qtd. in Lambert, 2008). Lambert (2011) theorizes that shrinking neurons is the body's way of conserving vital resources as the brain uses up to 20% of the body's energy at any given moment. In short we desperately need coping strategies to help us mitigate the harmful effects of the ever-present chronic stress of modern life in order to be emotionally and physically healthy (Lambert, 2008). Craft behaviors are often an effective coping strategy, and we may benefit by more consciously working them into our daily lives. An examination of the barriers to craft behaviors, such as economic disincentivization, lack of educational resources, and social barriers may help to reintegrate beneficial daily practices into the lives of ordinary people.

**Positive psychology.** In this section of the literature review, I discuss the application of positive psychology to craft practice. I then move into a discussion of the relationship between psychological capital, craft practice and well-being. Martin Seligman, the founder of positive psychology addresses the issue of subjective well-being or happiness. Positive psychology focuses on “the strengths and virtues that enable individuals and communities to thrive” (Seligman, 2004). Instead of looking at psychological dysfunction in individuals, positive psychology attempts to identify and address the elements of success in a given life. The discipline of positive psychology drives my research effort in that I am interested in examining craft behaviors for the beneficent qualities they provide humans. Positive

psychology has uncovered a lot about what people can do to improve their overall well-being, thereby reducing both stress and depression. An important contributor to well-being is the engagement of flow in daily activities (Seligman, 2004). Flow is a psychological term coined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) and refers to the feeling that people experience when the activity they engage results in full concentration, a dissipation of self awareness, and a loss of the sense of time. There are a few other important elements in the achievement of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). For example, one's skill for the activity must be appropriate for the challenge inherent, one must be in the pursuit of a clear goal with a clear idea about what to do next, and one must also be able to ascertain feedback on progress toward the goal; that is, you need to know you're getting somewhere (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). According to Seligman, flow is an important element of achieving gratification and human satisfaction (2004).

Researchers stop short of suggesting that flow is a necessary element of well-being, but the consensus is that flow is desirable and contributes to satisfaction and happiness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Seligman, 2004). Csikszentmihalyi (1993) discusses the consequences of flow as aiding creativity, peak performance, talent development, productivity, self esteem, and stress reduction. He also suggests that it might be useful in clinical applications. When we address the idea of flow, we often refer to artistic endeavors; however, flow can result from a variety of tasks, anything from creating a spreadsheet at work to mopping the kitchen floor. There are also varying degrees of flow in which one can be engaged (Seligman, 2004). Certainly many craft behaviors are to some extent flow-inducing.

***Psychological capital.*** Seligman (2004) discusses the idea that flow contributes to the development of psychological capital. Seligman (2004) believes that flow is an evolutionary mechanism by which we build psychological capital through the investment of mental resources in which “gratification marks the achievement of psychological growth” (p. 117). Craft behaviors may result in a state of flow for participants and result in psychological capital. It is my contention that Western civilization is often flow impoverished. That is, many of the behaviors we engage do not produce much flow, and we suffer from a deficit of psychological capital as a result which leaves us more vulnerable to mental and emotional dysfunction, such as depression and anxiety.

Positive psychological capital is the developmental state of an individual as characterized by high self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resiliency (Luthans & Youssef, 2004). Engaging craft behaviors is one way of building psychological capital. It is helpful to engage an economic metaphor when thinking about craft behaviors. We invest time and labor into a craft project. The project engages the effort driven rewards circuit which contributes to positive psychological capital (in addition to providing physiological relief) (Lambert, 2008). In addition, fruitful labor (hinging on skill acquisition) provides another layer of psychological capital via a sense of accomplishment and gratification (Seligman, 2004).

In his discussion of Western cultural conceptions of happiness, Seligman (2004) laments that Western culture rarely distinguishes between gratification and pleasure. Pleasures are mostly sensual, whereas gratifications are more emotional in nature. While pleasures might include enjoyable flavors or massages, gratifications might include the feeling associated with a job well done or altruistic activities. It is important to note that

gratifications are often not exactly pleasurable. In a study of 500 high-flow and low-flow teenagers, Csikszentmihalyi found that high-flow teenagers scored higher on every measure of psychological well-being except one (Seligman, 2004). This all important exception is that high-flow teenagers, who were engaged in hobbies, sports, and homework, believed that their low-flow peers, who were engaged in hanging out at the mall and watching television, were having more fun (Seligman, 2004). High-flow teenagers are more likely to go to college, have deeper social ties, and be more successful later in life (Seligman, 2004). This finding is disturbing because it indicates that we are not very good at identifying the behaviors that will bring us the greatest subjective well-being. The narratives we hold about the behaviors we engage may not reflect the emerging science of well-being. That is, if my self-talk revolves around wishing that I had less to do and that I could spend my time doing nothing, I may be mistaken about what actually brings me high subjective well-being. In reality, doing nothing may be one of the worst ways I can choose to spend my time if I seek high subjective well-being.

Seligman (2004) attributes the rise in depression in part to the increasing “short cuts to happiness” (p. 118). Many of our daily activities require no effort whatsoever. As I am writing this, I am drinking a glass of orange juice that I poured for myself. I did not grow the oranges, pick the fruit, or squeeze the juice. Drinking prepared orange juice which I purchased from the store is wholly effortless, a behavior which Seligman (2004) suggests robs me of gratification. I experience the pleasure of the orange juice without the gratification of having produced it. I have engaged a short-cut to happiness. Seligman (2004) distinguishes between pleasure and gratification. If I had produced the orange juice myself, I would have experienced the gratification of having produced it in accompaniment

with the pleasure of having consumed it. Unfortunately, I missed the opportunity for gratification and skipped straight to the pleasure. Certainly our modern life requires limiting gratification inducing behaviors to some extent; however, the ever increasing “short cuts to happiness” may be creating a gratification impoverished culture (Seligman, 2004, p. 118).

Behaviors that result in gratification are often flow-inducing behaviors as well. I take issue with Seligman’s (2004) idea that gratifications are activities we very much like doing. I suggest that many of the activities that we cognitively dislike are both gratifying and flow-inducing. I further suggest that there is a disconnection between activities that we cognitively like and activities that are good for us from the perspective of subjective well-being and mental health. Many people don’t enjoy exercise, but they are physically rewarded when they engage in exercise via endorphins, and exercise, at least to some extent, is undoubtedly good for us. I suggest that the same may be true for craft behaviors. In the same way that exercise is necessary for good physical health, I think that gratifications are necessary for good mental health. In the past, we did not have to work in exercise. It was a natural byproduct of survival. The same was true for gratifications. Perhaps we are finally reaching the state in modern Western culture where gratifications aren’t inherent in survival. If we are a culture that doesn’t provide a great deal of gratification in its work environments, we would expect to see either an upsurge of gratification inducing behaviors elsewhere or we should see increases in gratification deficits, such as depression and lowered measures of subjective well-being. In the United States, we see both.

I would like to extend the conversation about psychological capital beyond the boundaries of current research. I suggest that not only does our invested time and labor help us to build a reserve of psychological capital, but also that we often earn a compound interest

on the investment. I built a floor lamp when I was pregnant with my son. It has a heavy cherry wood base that I turned on a wood lathe and a long cherry shaft with walnut in-lays. I earned psychological capital while building that lamp. I engaged my effort driven rewards circuit and produced a fruitful product from which I felt a sense of gratification and accomplishment. I also earned a great deal of social praise as I carted my lamp around for folks to view. The lamp now stands in my living room, and I feel a surge of pride and well-being every time I look at it. I experience a compound interest return on my investment. The lamp continues to stockpile psychological capital for me as I encounter it in my daily life.

The social benefits of arts and crafts behaviors are well-established and have been discussed by many researchers and social theorists (Dissanayake, 1992; Dutton, 2009; Hetland et al., 2007; Winner, 1982). The literature available explores the social value of art from sex selection and group cohesiveness (Dissanayake, 1992) to the value of encouraging civic engagement (Saguaro Seminar on Civic Engagement in America, 2000) to improving learning outcomes in a variety of disciplines (Hetland et al., 2007). There is little doubt that the arts are good for us.

***Behavioral activation therapy.*** Lambert's (2008) effort driven rewards theory suggests that behavioral interventions can have a powerful effect on depression. Meta studies which explore the effects of SSRI's, the primary pharmaceutical intervention for depressive symptoms, find a 65% relief rate among depressives for which there is a 45-55% placebo effect (Seligman, 2011). Further, the pharmaceutical drugs are more reliable among severely depressed individuals, while for the moderately depressed, the pharmaceutical intervention is essentially nonexistent (Fournier et al., 2010). Many cognitive behavioral therapy interventions which focus on treating depression have emerged (Hollon & Shelton,

2001). Behavioral activation therapy emerged as an alternative to cognitive therapies (Martell & Dimidjian, 2010). Behavioral activation therapy is a highly personalized mode of activating depressed “clients in specific ways that will increase rewarding experiences in their lives” (Martell & Dimidjian, 2010, p.21). In an influential study, Jacobson (1996) used three treatment conditions among 150 depressed individuals: behavioral activation; behavioral activation plus cognitive restructuring of automatic thoughts; and a full cognitive therapy package including behavioral activation, cognitive restructuring of automatic thoughts, and cognitive restructuring of core beliefs. The findings surprised many when there were “no significant differences among the three treatments, either in the acute treatment of depression or in the prevention of relapse across a two-year follow-up” (Martell & Dimidjian, 2010, p.4). The fundamental goal of behavioral activation therapy is to increase “activation and engagement in one’s world” (Martell & Dimidjian, 2010, p.21). Behavioral activation therapy is consistent with Smith’s (2002) theory that depression is an evolutionary adaptation. Smith (2002) notes that the outcomes of depression characterized by “reduced activity and a reduction in social interactions, particularly competitive ones” might be advantageous behaviors in some environments (p. 127). According to Smith, “it is easy to imagine natural selection favoring the evolution” of behaviors which result in conflict resolution (Smith, 2002, p. 127). If depression is an evolved response to conflict or stressors in which we switch into a shut down mode, behavioral activation therapy may be a way of switching us back on or re-booting our effort drive rewards neural circuit, as Lambert (2008) describes.

**Expressive arts therapy.** The growing field of expressive arts therapy is made up of differing modern perspectives on ancient practices of the union of art making and healing.

Certainly the arts and healing have been long connected in human civilization; however, the field of art therapy and later, expressive arts therapy are uniquely 20th century constructions. While each of the programs working in this emerging discipline has similarities, there are also important differences among them. The three most influential schools of thought around expressive arts therapy emerge from the programs at Appalachian State University founded by Sally Atkins, Lesley University founded led by Shaun McNiff, and the European Graduate School founded by Paolo Knill. While I am broadening my experience with the different schools of thought, my research and literature review are profoundly influenced by the Appalachian State University program in expressive arts therapy.

While there is a body of literature around expressive arts therapy, much of the knowledge of the field is passed down through direct contact with programs and program leaders. Both the practice and the training for the field of expressive arts therapy is embedded within a poietic understanding which is somewhat outside the bounds of traditional academic cognitive thought. The philosophy behind expressive arts therapy rises from classical and early postmodern philosophers including Aristotle, Plato, Heidegger, Nietzsche, Kant, Derrida, and Lacan in conversation with various forms of psychotherapy (Knill et al., 2005). There is a literature gap around expressive arts therapy and postmodern post structural analysis and issues of materiality, yet material feminism, post structuralism, and emerging neurobiology have much to offer this field by way of both advancing understanding of what happens during the process of expressive arts therapy and expanding the field.

The term *poiesis* or knowing by making (Levine, 1992) is altered by its association with expressive arts therapy. For Aristotle, the term *poiesis* describes an epistemology and



exists as a triumvirate whereby it is understood via oppositional logic, held against *theoria* (knowing by observing) and *praxis* (knowing by doing or acting; McKeon, 1941). For Aristotle, the knowledge acquired from observation is the most important, followed by the knowledge acquired by practice; meanwhile, the knowledge acquired by making things (*poiesis*) is the least important and is essentially little more than the technical skill required for craftspeople to produce their wares (McKeon, 1941). *Poiesis* is even lower in the estimation of Plato and is devoid of knowledge altogether, relegated to little more than a mania of inspiration for artists (Bloom, 1968). For Plato, poietic production is a form of madness causing chaos and disturbance to the extent that he considers a peaceful civil life uninhabitable in a land of poets who he consequently bans from the Republic (Bloom, 1968).

Levine traces the origins of the concept of *poiesis*, altering the meaning through his analysis and ultimately claiming it “as the central concept in a philosophy of expressive arts therapy” (Knill et al, 2005, p. 31). Levine’s (1992) discussion of *poiesis* alters the term into a practice which occurs outside the bounds of intellect via the surrender to a process which is necessarily unpredictable. Levine adopts and celebrates Plato’s Dionysian *poiesis* in which unpredictability is embedded as a necessary phase of the process of creation (Knill et al., 2005). The chaos that Plato feared was destructive (Bloom, 1968) whereas the chaos that Levine embraces is generative (Knill et al., 2005). This creative and generative concept of chaos is akin to theories of strong emergence in which linear narratives of cause and effect begin to dissipate (Koestler & Smythies, 1971). This conversation would be fruitfully advanced if analyzed via a complexity theory discussion of representation and emergence (Osberg, Biesta, & Cilliers, 2008). Levine’s (1992) discussion of *poiesis* has much in common with emerging arts-based inquiry research practice such as A/R/Tography, poetic

transcription, and the many other dynamic forms arts-based research takes, and should be further explored.

Levine's (1992) analysis of the process of understanding through the liminal spaces of traditional cognitive knowledge via art making resonates with the Braidottian (2006) material feminist approach to knowledge and understanding as transpositional. The notion of transpositions is "an in-between space of zigzagging and of crossing: non-linear, but not chaotic; nomadic, yet accountable and committed; creative but also cognitively valid; discursive and also materially embedded" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 5). The defining characteristics of reality via oppositional logic and linear thought processes are inverted and transposed for more complex meaning. Transpositional epistemology is very similar to Levine's (1992) poietic psychology - epistemology in which he works against a philosophy whereby "reason is understood to be characterized by order, clarity and coherence of thought, the capacity to see reality as it is without delusion" (p. 9). Instead Levine seeks a materially embedded, chaotic, unpredictable, poietic understanding of the world via art making in which rationality is not privileged or reproduced, yet not seeping beyond the bounds of cognitive coherence as so often happens as one begins to embrace complexity (Knill et al., 2005). The seeker (client, learner, philosopher, artist) in the case of Braidotti's (2006) transpositions discussion emerges as a nomadic subject who lingers in liminality or interstitial spaces, who searches for meaning beyond the oppositional logic of binaries. Levine's seeker enacts the same process via art making and adopts the term *poiesis* to describe the emergent form of knowledge acquisition and creation (Knill et al., 2005). Materiality and non-cognitively privileged creativity is not a rejection of intellect or even rationality, but is a refiguring of rationality, as part of a profound internal and systemic change to the concept of rationality.

In addition to the literature gap connecting expressive arts therapy to emerging philosophical thought via material feminism and poststructural analysis, the field of neurobiology has much to offer expressive arts therapy in emerging theory about how art making happens both physically and metaphorically. According to Jung, the brain science theory of transient hypofrontality offers not only a coherent explanation of the experience of art-making but also a metaphor which mirrors the importance of living within the liminal spaces of non-cognitive creating (Tippett, 2012). For example, physical exercise induces transient hypofrontality. Essentially the brain busies itself with regulating the body and taking in the sensory cues of moving through the world (Dietrich, 2006; Tippett, 2012). The brain dials down the use of cognitive resources during this time, and we see a calming of the frontal lobe (Tippett, 2012). Interestingly, research is beginning to show that transient hypofrontality is the brain state most conducive to creativity. The cognitive brain slows down and the impact is akin to meandering; whereas, during heightened cognitive states, brain paths are straightforward and based on hierarchies of relationship toward the greatest efficiency available (Tippett, 2012). The goal of a heightened cognitive state is to find the best solution to a worldly problem as quickly as possible. During transient hypofrontality, the cognitive resources are in decline, and the brain is free to associate ideas in novel ways in which relationship hierarchies are relaxed, giving rise to heightened creativity (Tippett, 2012). Transient hypofrontality offers a coherent understanding of how poiesis brings about new knowledge, subverts traditional cognitive paths, disrupts linear narratives, and is one way of understanding the therapeutic impact of art making in that it can help seekers move beyond simplistic understandings of the world which often lock us into harmful behavioral patterns.

Expressive arts therapy enables an art-craft binary rupture in that it moves art beyond an understanding of aesthetics into an understanding of the knowledge derived from the process of creating within liminality (i.e., poiesis). The field marries process and product as important sources of insight, and the focus is on the potential knowledge garnered from living within the liminal space of non-cognitive creation. The expansion of a focus on process *and* product is a de facto rupture of the art-craft binary, in that the practitioner does not solely end with an aesthetic focus on product as occurs in normative Euro-American art practice. Instead practitioners engage both product and process not only for their aesthetic contribution but also for what they bring to the practitioner in terms of insight or information about one's place and condition in the world.

Expressive arts therapy focuses on a way of being and understanding the world and our place in it and requires practitioners to live a daily art practice toward those therapeutic ends. It is worth noting that the idea of the importance of a daily practice is unique to the Appalachian school of thought in expressive arts therapy (Appalachian Expressive Arts Collective, 2003). The union of product and process as equally important for providing information and insight into the therapeutic process is very similar if not identical to the same union found among arts-based inquiry practices, perhaps not surprising given that McNiff (2008) is so deeply embedded in both disciplines. In this sense, the terms therapy and inquiry are used in very similar ways. Likewise, the benefits of craft practice are not solely in having produced a fine product; however, in keeping with the psychological capital theory in positive psychology, the production of a fine product is beneficial.

The value of art making within expressive arts therapy is related to what it has to offer us about our place in the world, as opposed to its sole aesthetic offerings, as is the case

with normative Euro-American art making discussed by Shiner (2001). Certainly, the commoditization of art begins to erode the philosophical space created by expressive arts. In the dissolution of the commodified product, process becomes the focus and the goal moves beyond creating art into complex self analysis and understanding. Knill et al.'s (2005) concept of "low skill/high sensitivity" (p. 97) art making is but one example in which expressive arts therapy begins to subvert normative Euro-American art practice in favor of complex meaning making. Seekers are often practitioners of art brut or outsider art; however, Knill et al. (2005) does not conflate this practice into a simple high-low art binary. Instead Knill et al. (2005) focuses on a polyphonic aesthetic in which high and low art intermingle. Expressive arts therapists are serious about the practice of art in its multitude of forms and seek experience and even expertise in a wide array of arts modalities, yet with the understanding that the practice of expressive arts therapy is to make meaning by connecting to everyday culture and experience which is possible, sometimes even preferable, in very low skill settings. In opposition, high skill art tends to be more product-oriented and aesthetics-oriented in keeping with normative Euro-American art practices. As a result, practitioners may be focused on producing a product of value, bypassing the potential for insight. In such circumstances, using a low skill setting may help practitioners avoid the pressure to create objects of solely aesthetic value.

My discussion of expressive arts therapy often gravitates toward the biology of art making and how it contributes to well-being. The Appalachian school of expressive arts therapy establishes art making and creative expression as "healing, growth-producing processes in and of themselves, not adjunctive to traditional therapy" (Appalachian Expressive Arts Collective, 2003, p. 12). My interest is in expanding this line of thought;

however, I want to be careful not to situate art solely within the confines of biology or therapy. Firstly, I do not want to slip into the art-science binary whereby art becomes colonized by the science or biology of its making. Secondly, I want to honor the discourse of art as meaning maker. I turn to Knill et al.'s (2005) discussion of crystallization theory and Richards's (1989) discussion of art, spirituality, and cosmology in an effort to avoid the simple binaristic conflation of art as biology. Crystallization theory pertains to the basic human yearning to crystallize psychic material and articulate the essence of human experience, to make meaning by giving form to experience through the arts (Knill, Barba, & Fuchs, 1995). One could take an art as biology argument as primary and relegate crystallization theory to little more than self-delusion, a way of explaining or unnecessarily psychologizing the urge to create art, which is solely biological. A reductive art as biology argument or even an argument based solely on art as therapy robs the practice of art from its complex psycho social impact on humanity. I want to be cautious to avoid belittling the complex psycho-social need for humans to make meaning. Further, I want to honor the spiritual need of humans to integrate and animate the arts within a living cosmology (Richards, 1989). There is a vast unexplored connection between the work of MC Richards and emerging material feminist philosophy especially in relationship to Richards's exploration of the union of opposites in the quest for understanding self and universe (Richards, 1989). An exploration of art and craft practices beyond the science - spirit binary opens amazing possibilities for understanding how art works within humans. For example, Haidt's (2012) discussion of climbing the staircase toward self-transcendence in which he likens religious ecstasy to the self transcendent spirituality of awe is a spiritual discussion easily applied to art and easily animated by a conversation about the neurobiology of

transient hypofrontality. The rupturing of this science-spirit binary opens many such conversations.

The discussion of effort driven rewards and theories of building psychological capital through accomplishment and gratification also offer a more nuanced understanding of how expressive arts therapies might contribute to well-being. When we pull the threads of emerging neurobiology, poststructural analysis and material feminism, art-craft practice, psychological capital, arts-based inquiry and expressive arts therapy, we weave a tapestry that offers a new epistemological, perhaps even ontological, understanding of being in the world. This tapestry has a story to tell about well-being and art-craft practice. I hope to bring this story forward and hold it with the stories I solicit from artists and crafters in practice. It is this liminal space that I hope to occupy with this research project. As I move through this research project, the connections between expressive arts therapy and the other lenses I use in my conceptual framework become clearer, the connecting tethers more plentiful. I find ways to move with the complexity into a simple field of craft practice which enhances, even enables well-being for artists and crafters.

### **Sociocultural Craft Practices**

The third section of this literature review focuses on the psychosocial barriers to art and craft production in terms of behavioral economics and the arts in US public education. In the behavioral economics section, I discuss the production of the economic metanarrative, hyperconsumption models of US consumer behavior, cost benefit analysis of US handmade production of goods, and a discussion of market norms and social norms. I then move into a discussion of US public schooling around issues of policy and aims of US educational practices.

This research project seeks to better understand the barriers that artists and crafters face when engaging art making and crafting. This portion of the literature review explores behavioral economics toward a discussion of the economic disincentivization to human making. This section also explores the educational system as complicit in disincentivizing human making by redefining labor via cognitive privilege.

**Behavioral economics.** The discipline of behavioral economics emerged in the attempt to understand psychosocial factors of economic systems, both individually and institutionally. In this section of the literature review, I discuss the production of the economic metanarrative, hyperconsumption models of US consumer behavior, cost benefit analysis of US handmade production of goods, and a discussion of market norms and social norms. I am interested in behavioral economics as it applies to individuals. That is, I am using this field to guide my understanding of the cognitive, emotional and social economic factors of craft behaviors among individuals. I am particularly interested in the impact of the shifts from social norms to market norms on the psychological capital returns of craft behaviors.

**Economic metanarrative.** There is an interesting intersection between craft behaviors and the economic culture of modern Western civilization. Western culture has a prevailing economic metanarrative which serves as a primary variable for much of our decision making strategies (Fine, 2000; Haque, 2011; Michaels, 2011). That is, our economic culture ultimately drives many of our behaviors, and I have become interested in how the economic metanarrative impacts craft behaviors. I am particularly interested in exploring the justification narratives, a term borrowed from economic budget proposals, that



crafters employ in order to subvert the economic metanarrative that often, left alone, has the potential to disincentivize craft behaviors.

I am interested in this intersection because I have come to believe that it is important to be active producers of the goods and products in our lives. In an economic environment which ultimately discourages producing goods in favor of consuming goods produced elsewhere, how do we justify continuing to engage in production behaviors that contribute to our overall well-being and quality of life? At its base, my research topic is about our daily behaviors, how we might obtain higher quality of life and healthier communities and educational systems.

In the United States, when asked what one thing will most significantly increase their happiness, respondents overwhelmingly point to more money (Weiner, 2008). It's no coincidence that measures of well-being in the United States are often tied to measures of consumer confidence (Revkin, 2005). Further, political discourse often ranks the health of our nation by the measure of our Gross Domestic Product (Haque, 2011). I am interested in how this economic order impacts subjective well-being and the US educational system.

In my study I plan to look at the impact of the economic metanarrative as a shared cultural experience which drives behavior and policy with respect to craft behaviors. The economic metanarrative falls under a great deal of criticism now as the global experience of increasing inequity, violations of social justice and declining environmental integrity take center stage in many of our lives (Haque, 2011; Michaels, 2011). We are experiencing a wellspring of global dissent as we witness uprisings in many countries coupled with the Occupy movement (We are the 99%, 2011). While my topic is intimately related to these power struggles, I plan to look more specifically at how the economic metanarrative drives

behavior and policy with respect to craft behaviors. Further, I plan to explore what those behaviors and policy decisions bring to bear on our overall quality of life. My study is a small but important piece of the puzzle of declining subjective well-being in modern civilization.

A cultural metanarrative "is a global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience" (Stephens & McCallum, 1998, p. 6). I use Lyotard's (1984) notion that our reality is constructed and held hostage by metanarratives or grand narratives, which are necessarily bereft of the complexity of being and consequently challenged in postmodern and critical theories. Lyotard (1984) believed, as do I, that part of the postmodern condition is to reject and deconstruct these hegemonic narratives. Many theorists have begun to think about the metanarrative of modern western civilization as economic in nature (Fine, 2000; Haque, 2011; Joseph, 2007). As a culture, we share key beliefs and assumptions that shape our experiences:

The governing pattern a culture obeys is a master story— one narrative in society that takes over the others, shrinking diversity and forming a monoculture. When you're inside a master story at a particular time in history, you tend to accept its definition of reality. You unconsciously believe and act on certain things, and disbelieve and fail to act on other things. That's the power of the monoculture; it's able to direct us without us knowing too much about it. (Michaels, 2011, p. 1)

I think of the economic metanarrative as the psycho-sociology of a culture in which the main form of goods exchange is capitalist and the dominant form of relationships is increasingly exchange based. Fine (2009) discusses the colonization of the social sciences by economics in terms of shifting boundaries whereupon economics takes over and bleeds

into all other aspects of life in terms of economics imperialism. Michaels (2011) provides insight about the hidden nature of living within the machinery of the economic metanarrative; this is the story of Homo Economicus:

In economic thought, being rational doesn't mean that you're sensible or that you're a clear thinker. Being rational means that when you're faced with a decision, you move through a three-stage process to decide what to do. Assuming you know what your goals are, you first lay out all the ways you could reach each goal and identify the costs and benefits of each possibility. Next, you analyze which option is most efficient — the one that most directly lets you get the most of what you want while costing you the least of your resources. Finally, you choose that most efficient option, because in the economic story, your best choice is always the most efficient choice.

(p. 10)

The economic frame of our lives drives our decision making and behaviors privileging economic factors disproportionately. Decisions are based on efficiency and often don't privilege perspectives concerning what is necessary for human thriving, and ultimately, we sacrifice human potential in the process (Haque, 2011). My argument is that we often reject or diminish beneficial behaviors as a result of an economically driven hyperconsumption lifestyle and the cost benefit analysis that we subconsciously perform while moving through consumer culture. The behaviors we reject or diminish, including craft behaviors, are related to a large scale flow and gratification impoverishment plaguing the United States.

***Hyperconsumption.*** In the 20th century, technological advancement vastly increased US production capacity and later global production capacity (Leonard & Conrad, 2010). An

increase in economic capital allowed US corporations to outsource goods, thereby raising production yield while lowering production costs ultimately fueling Western consumerism to devour the plethora of over-produced goods (Leonard & Conrad, 2010). Western hyperconsumption is an easy path to plot. With the help of technological advancements, many industries multiplied their production capacity tenfold during the 20th century (Leonard & Conrad, 2010). A culture suddenly burdened with ten times the goods had little recourse but to consume ten times the goods.

My interest here is in what happens to US citizens moving through this great consumer system. What are the behavioral and psychological impacts of this lifestyle? With the world divided between producers and consumers, it's often taken for granted that being a consumer is a good thing and being a producer is a bad thing, and justifiably so (Timmerman, 2009). Producers are often engaged in sweatshop labor in polluted environments (Timmerman, 2009). I want to examine the US public for a moment, not as complicit in the system of the global production of goods, but instead as a victim of consumerism.

Kahnema, Knetsch, & Thaler (1990) performed an experiment in which he offered students a mug and asked them how much they were willing to pay for it. He then took another group of students and gave them the mug. He asked how much they would need to give it back. The first group of students valued the mug at \$3.50 and the second group of students valued the mug at \$7. This study illustrated the point that once we have acquired an object, its value increases. This is the sort of human behavior that makes consumerism particularly awful. As we fulfill our role in the consumer machine of modern life, we cycle goods into our homes. Yet, we know from the above study that we aren't very good at cycling goods out of our homes, and as a result, we get overloaded with stuff. We overvalue

items that we bring into our homes and have difficulty releasing them when they begin to take up space or lose their value.

In addition, consumerism actively discourages gratification inducing behaviors, including craft behaviors. Let's assume for a moment that I decide I need a blanket. What are my options? I could make a blanket, or I could work, save some money, and buy a blanket. Let's say that I have worked and have some money saved. Now, an average person might do a quick cost benefit analysis at which virtually all consumers are very skilled to the extent that the analysis is almost subconscious (Ariely, 2008; Michaels, 2011). I might reasonably conclude that the costs of making the blanket are higher than the costs of buying. The most efficient economic decision consistent with our economic metanarrative is to purchase the blanket. We have all heard the consumer refrain, "I can buy it cheaper than I can make it." While there are inherent social justice issues in the real and often hidden or extricated production costs (Leonard & Conrad, 2010), I want to talk about the real consumer value instead. We calculate the material costs, we value our time at what we can get paid, and we easily conclude that the most efficient economic decision is to buy a blanket.

***Cost benefit analysis.*** The actual retail cost of a king size (110 inches by 96 inches) quilt from Bed, Bath, and Beyond ranged from \$60 - \$370 in 2011. The materials for the production of a comparable blanket are conservatively as follows, 11 yards fabric \$8 per yard (\$88), batting (\$36.79), and an additional \$10 for thread, needles, binding, and other supplies. So, the total materials cost would be around \$135. The time involved in the construction of the comforter is conservatively estimated at about one hour per square foot for piecing and quilting. A king size quilt is about 75 square feet. The value of skilled labor is conservatively estimated at \$15 per hour for a total construction cost of \$1,125. We add the

time and materials and conclude that the market economy cost of a quilt we make is \$1,260 and the market economy cost of a purchased quilt averages \$215 for a total gain of \$1,045 by purchasing the quilt instead of making it.

There are two flaws in this equation. The first flaw is that the \$215 Bed, Bath and Beyond quilt has extricated social and environmental costs that are not included in the equation (Leonard & Conrad, 2010). For example, the workers who created the quilt are often not well-rewarded for their labor, and the materials used to create the quilt are often extracted without sustainable methods. There are costs to producing and buying things within our current capitalist system that are not reflected in the price of the items we buy (Leonard & Conrad, 2010). So, the actual cost to human quality of life is much higher than it appears. It is important to note that cost and value do not occupy the same number, as we saw above in Kahneman et al.'s (1990) mug experiment.

The second flaw is related to the value of the handmade quilt versus the cost of the handmade quilt. When we only calculate economic value, of the handmade quilt, we compare the resulting product to what we could purchase it for in the world (as opposed to what we have in it). That value is based on what the market will bear. So, the cost appears to be quite high when we include the value of our time (\$1,260), but the value appears to be about (\$215) or perhaps less if the quality of our work is below market standards. The resulting value of the quilt we make is complicated by the social, cultural and psychological capital gains that we acquire. The value we place on our labor may also be complicated by what we do with the products we create.

The *value* of the final quilted product probably doesn't rest in our minds at \$1125; however, it does rest in our minds at a *cost* of \$1125. This irrationality of human reasoning

needs to be addressed in research. In addition, we don't include the intrinsic value of flow and gratification we receive from having created the blanket when we base our decisions solely on economic efficiency. Ultimately, I think the market value of the home made quilt is both represented at having a higher cost than it actually does (specifically related to the value of the time being spent) and a lesser finished product value for an interacting super-inflation of the craft behavior in a product oriented analysis via market norms.

It's an interesting paradox that we value our time too much to make an item, but that in our minds we don't compute the value of the resulting item as higher than the value of the purchased item. This is where I believe the cost benefit analysis is sullied by irrational human behaviors. The cost of this system is that we rob ourselves of the gratification of having made the blanket and the daily capital return (psychological, social, cultural) of the investment of that gratification as we continually use the blanket we've made. In consumer culture, it is necessary to create complicated justification narratives in order to afford to engage in gratification and flow inducing craft behaviors which are disincentivized by the economic metanarrative. This discussion is complicated by recent findings in behavioral economics which further explore issues of value (Norton, Mochon, & Ariely, 2012).

It's because of this complicated valuing of material goods that we may experience a disincentive to make things. The ultimate question becomes, is it worth it? Is it worth my time and resources to create a quilt when I can buy one for little money? If craft behaviors contribute to well-being, then we need a justification narrative that overcomes the economic disincentive to producing our own goods. For example, we know that exercise is good for us. It's so important to us that some of us are willing to pay for gym memberships in order to exercise more consistently or efficiently. We use our economic resources because we have a

very good justification narrative-exercise is necessary to live a happy, healthy life. If we had a similar justification narrative for craft behaviors, we could more easily overcome some of the economic barriers that we experience.

***Market norms and social norms.*** Another interesting avenue of the impact of the economic metanarrative explores how our relationships shift when the setting is largely exchange based. In a 1979 study of undergraduate students in a Maryland University, Clark and Mills (1979) explored the distinction between communal relationships and exchange relationships (p. 12). Communal relationships, also referred to as *social norms* (Ariely, 2008, p. 68), are relationships in which the giving of a benefit in response to a need for the benefit is appropriate (Clark & Mills, 1979, p. 12). For example, in a communal relationship, I may stop on the side of the road to help someone change a flat tire. My help is offered in response to a need and nothing is expected in return. Alternatively, Exchange relationships, also referred to as *market norms* (Ariely, 2008, p. 68), are relationships in which the giving of a benefit in response to the receipt of a benefit is appropriate (Clark & Mills, 1979, p. 12). In an exchange relationship, I would help a person change a tire, and in exchange, I would receive a payment.

Clark and Mills (1979) found that the receipt of a benefit when engaged in an exchange relationship increased attraction; whereas the receipt of a benefit when engaged in a communal relationship decreased attraction (p. 12). Ariely (2008) presents this human behavior scenario in a narrative that helps enlighten the principle (pp. 68-69). If you go to someone's house for dinner and bring a \$20 bottle of wine, you are warmly welcomed into the home and (hopefully) a nice evening ensues; however, if you show up to a person's house for dinner and give the host a \$20 bill, market and social norms collide and trouble ensues (p.



69). Exchange relationships or market norms are so dominant in the economic metanarrative of market economy consumer cultures that market norms are almost everywhere resulting in a de facto “economics imperialism” (Fine, 2000, p. 10) in which the social sciences are essentially colonized by economic systems of logic.

Ariely, (2008) found that the mere mentioning of money is sufficient for market norms to emerge, even when no money changes hands and that “introducing market norms into social exchanges violates social norms and hurts relationships, and finally, that once this shift occurs, recovering the social relationship is difficult” (p. 76). One of the issues my research project explores is the nature of the shift as we engage the cost benefit analysis of craft behaviors; we shift away from the social norm and into the market norm which not only has the potential to disincentivize craft behaviors, but more importantly, sacrifice the psychological capital gains of the behavior. Craft behaviors traditionally and often today rest in communal spaces that have the potential to benefit crafters; however, situating those social relationships within market norms may diminish the positive returns. As a producer of goods (crafts) where economics is the driving narrative, I have to try to make up the lost economic resources (sunk costs) in the items I produce. However, if I carried a justification narrative about health (as in the exercise example) in order to engage craft behaviors, I would be able to overcome some of these market norm conditions of exchange relationships. Suddenly, the new narrative allows me to be able to justify being a producer of the goods in my life because it’s good for me, even if it costs a little more. A well-being justification narrative is not without problems. Often the well-being marketing model in which people do what is good for them co-opts a health movement in an effort to commoditize yet another aspect of human experience, forcing us to become consumers of good health as opposed to practitioners of

healthy habits, consumers of craft supplies and experiences as opposed to practitioners of a craftsman lifestyle.

**The arts in public education.** In this section of the literature review, I present a discussion of US public schooling around issues of policy and aims of US educational practices. One time advocate of testing accountability movement, Ravitch (2011) currently spends time researching and writing about the detrimental effects of NCLB on the US educational community. Ravitch (2011) explores many negative unintended consequences to the NCLB US educational policy, including its effects on arts education. When the US public education system began tying funding to privileged academic subjects (reading and math) via high stakes testing, arts education suffered. Testing in reading and math determined city, state and federal accountability and became the only subjects that mattered.

Arts education became superfluous as teachers and students knew the tests were the primary measures of success and failure. For example, a US Department of Education survey from 2008 “revealed that only 4% of [New York City’s] elementary schools met the state’s requirements for arts education [and] by 2009, nearly a third of the schools had no arts teachers” (Ravitch, 2011, p. 76). Unfortunately, curriculum narrowing and specifically, neglect of arts education became normative in many school districts.

In 2007, The Center on Education Policy surveyed a nationally representative group of school districts and found that 62% had increased the time devoted to reading and mathematics in elementary schools, while 44% reported that they had reduced the amount of time spent on science, social studies, and the arts (Ravitch, 2011, p. 108). Ironically, arts education in the US was listed as a core subject in federal law for the first time under NCLB, yet arts courses are being squeezed out as the law does not directly tie

funding to proficiency in arts, music, dance, or drama (Bourland, 2005). Further, arts education is difficult to measure with standards. My exploration of the arts in education continues as I move through this research project. I am finding a great deal to be concerned about in neoliberal arguments as I explore the complex relationship between economics and education (Giroux, 2009).

Arts education leads to higher quality education and improves the problem solving capabilities of students (Hardiman & Rich, 2009; Hetland et al., 2007). The US educational system has been usurped by the economic metanarrative of education (Giroux, 2009). The US No Child Left Behind public school policy has resulted in a consistent decline in Arts Education as schools focus relentlessly on subjects that are tested and linked to funding (Hetland et al., 2007). A central argument of this dissertation is for the re-instatement of arts education in public schools. While skill acquisition is not the only barrier to craft behaviors, it is certainly a significant barrier. The absence of arts education in public schools also contributes to a narrative of disincentivization for art and craft practice.

Many other arguments have been advanced for re-instating arts education. Researchers have attempted to make the case that arts education is important because it improves student performance in traditional academic subjects (Hetland et al., 2007). Some controversy surrounds the argument that arts-based educational initiatives contribute to more relevant academic goals like reading, writing and arithmetic; however, this dissertation seeks to move the argument for arts education beyond the additive instrumental argument traditionally put forth. I argue that reinstating arts education in public schools removes one of the barriers to lifelong practices which contribute to well-being and mental health. We should re-instate arts education not because it contributes financially or helps students

acquire other desirable academic skills, but instead because it improves the quality of students' lives.

*Happiness as an aim of education.* Nel Noddings (2003) asks “why is it that so many bright, creative people have hated school” (p. 1). Learning is inherent to humans, and many people love to learn. For most people, it is easy to learn that hot things will burn our hands, that the night always follows the day, that snow is cold. Many of the more complex things are easy to learn as well. If we spend time helping people in a garden, we quickly learn that seeds, water and sunlight will produce plants that bear fruit. When we are old enough to drive, we are easily motivated to learn how the vehicle responds to the turns of the wheel and pressure of the pedals. We spend a great deal of time learning things about the world and people, and many of us take great pleasure in learning all sorts of things. Noddings (2003) discusses the problems facing schooling in the United States in her text *Happiness and Education*. Among her chief concern is that we no longer properly engage in aims talk in education (Noddings, 2003). She is convinced that happiness is a proper aim of education and that we neglect it. Further, she questions our curriculum choices. Noddings (2003) asks “why do we insist on teaching all children algebra and teach them almost nothing about what it means to make a home” (p. 5).

My research helps illuminate why it is important to teach children not only cognitive skills like math, science, and literature, but also the skills that will help them become active makers of the goods in their lives. If adults are to engage in craft behaviors and become producers of the goods in their lives, then we should have more widespread programs giving them the skills to do so. Currently craft education is often left to the recesses of continuing education, to limited availability specialized schools, or to vocational programs deeply

embedded within the economic metanarrative. As I begin to illustrate the value of craft behaviors in daily life, I imagine what educational intervention might look like. It is toward this end that my research comes to bear on issues of educational leadership.

### **Maker Movement**

The maker movement is a cultural revolution in which tinkerers are setting up maker spaces. These spaces are the equivalent of the backyard wood shop, but often equipped with state of the art technological tools. The maker movement is fueled by the availability of “cheap, powerful and easy to use tools; easier access to knowledge capital and market; a renewed focus on community and local resources; a desire for more authentic and quality things; and a renewed interest in how to make things” (Hatch, 2013, p. 5). What began as a DIY cultural interest has morphed into a potential to change the nature of production and innovation, to shift how we make things and who gets to make them. This movement emerges from a technologically savvy demographic and springs from the digital revolution which advocates for open access for innovators essentially “democratizing access to the tools of the next industrial revolution” (Hatch, 2013, p. 9). Maker spaces are often filled with three-dimensional printers, programmable computerized cutting machines for wood and metal, laser cutters and other powerful tools. This movement also spawns a culture of social entrepreneurialism. For example, one group of social entrepreneurs used a Techshop maker space “to address the problem of infant thermoregulation in developing countries” where a continuous supply of electricity was not always available (Hatch, 2013, p. 8). The emergent product, a thermo-regulating blanket “is on track to save the lives of 100,000 premature babies in the next five years” (Hatch, 2013, p. 9). Maker spaces provide an opportunity for

individuals to develop and build things at a fraction of the cost it would normally take an individual to create the same product.

In addition to the development of maker spaces and the resulting shifting economic landscape, the maker movement creates a shift in how we value making practices in general. Hatch (2013) attempts to create an overview of the maker cultural revolution by producing one of the few books attempting to describe maker culture. Hatch (2013) describes what he believes are the core tenets of maker culture in his Maker Movement Manifesto:

- **Make:** Making is fundamental to what it means to be human
- **Share:** Sharing what you have made and what you know about making with other is the method by which a maker's feeling of wholeness is achieved.
- **Give:** There are few things more selfless and satisfying than giving away something you have made.
- **Learn:** Building a lifelong learning path ensures a rich and rewarding making life and, importantly, enables one to share.
- **Tool Up:** You must have access to the right tools for the project at hand.
- **Play:** Be playful while you are making and you will be surprised, excited, and proud of what you discover.
- **Participate:** Join the maker community and reach out to those around you who are discovering the joy of making.
- **Support:** This is a movement and it requires emotional, intellectual, financial, political and institutional support.
- **Change:** Since making is fundamental to what it means to be human, you will become a more complete version of you as you make.

Hatch's (2013) Manifesto opens a conversation about what it means to be a maker. It is a non-academic attempt at describing and understanding an unfolding cultural phenomenon. In the spirit of making, Hatch (2013) strongly encourages makers to adjust the maker manifesto to fit individual needs and to better describe the world of individual makers.

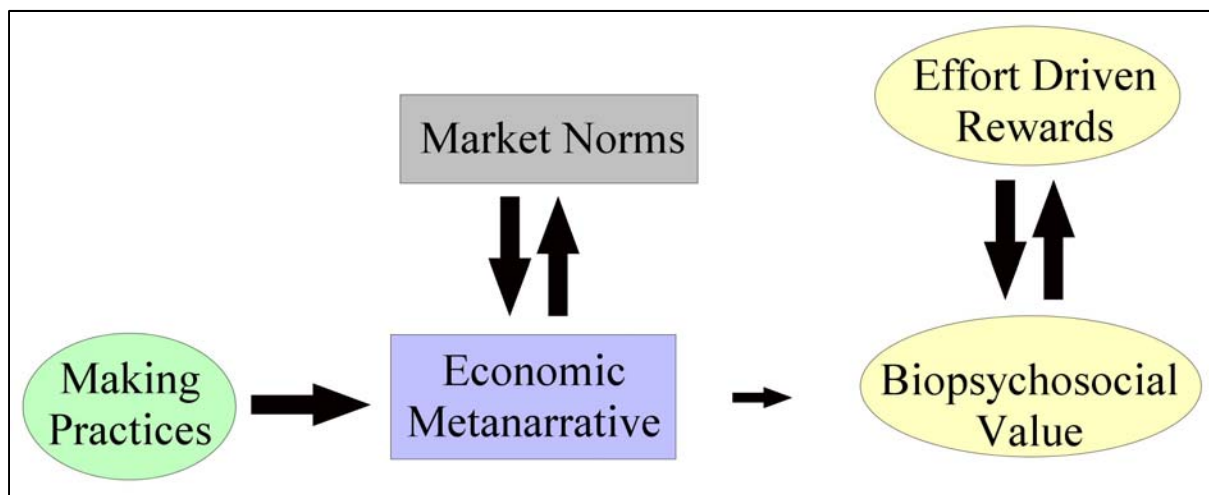
### **Conceptual Framework**

This literature review laid the groundwork for a developing transdisciplinary theory of human production practice as an extension of human well-being, which I refer to as the craftonomics theory. This theory is the conceptual framework for the research project. Craftonomics theory explores intricate threads in the complex weave of human art and craft practice in modern Western culture. According to Dissanayake (1992), the universality of making and enjoying art suggests that art is an important need among humans. Social scientists argue about the place that art holds in human experience. Grosz (2011) reasons that art is a function of sex selection because it has no survival value and is often extravagant and perilous. Dutton (2009) argues that art is a consequence of ancestral environment but that it falls short of an evolutionary biological adaptation. I suggest that we explore art making from a biopsychosocial perspective and that making practices contribute to well-being via Lambert's (2008) effort driven rewards theory.

In the 18th century, there was a cultural shift in which artist and artisan split (Shiner, 2001). Art moved from a large array of human production practices to products or objects of rapt attention (Shiner, 2001). During this time, artists became separate from artisans and were considered to be uniquely spiritually called to make art (Shiner, 2001). We moved from an environment in which art makes special, into an environment where special makes art. Art became elevated and extraordinary. That is, art was no longer something that

ordinary people could create. This cultural narrative invades our lives as we pathologically resist the label artist, an element which emerges in my research.

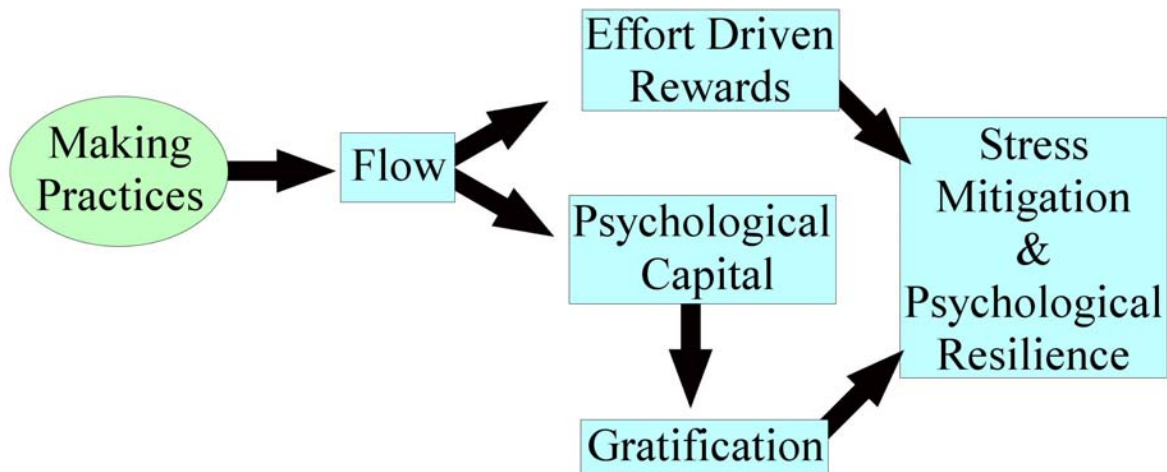
Modern Western culture resides within a ubiquitous economic metanarrative characterized by hyperconsumptive tendencies (Michaels, 2011). The combination of low overseas wages and material costs and the outsourcing of goods and labor have resulted in an environment in which we can buy things cheaper than we can make them (Leonard & Conrad, 2010). As a result, modern makers have difficulty developing a justification narrative in which to practice their crafts. Based on the literature review, I suspected that acting narratives might include makers labeling themselves artists, joining the e-commerce revolution, gifting, and skill acquisition. My research unpacks and explores these narratives in depth. The craftonomics theory suggests a narrative shift in which the justification for making is a well-being narrative. The narrative shift is precipitated on the idea that economic concerns introduced by market norms may disincentivize making practices which are fundamentally beneficial for well-being. Figure 1 is an illustration of the economic metanarrative interrupting the biopsychosocial value of making practices.



*Figure 1. Craftonomics theory.*



The theory uses the example of the epidemic of obesity in which we advocate paying for gym memberships and compares it to the epidemic of depression in which we advocate paying for woodworking classes or jewelry making supplies. Human production practice is a complicated biological, neurological, emotional, and psychological occurrence in which we experience gratification and build resilience, which supports our mental health. This theory is borne out via work being done in the fields of neuroscience (Lambert, 2008), positive psychology (Seligman, 2011), and counseling fields (Knill et al., 2005; Martell & Dimidjian, 2010). When we are wholly responsible for producing an object of value, we experience psychological capital in the form of resilience (Seligman, 2004). We bank these experiences and measure them against future failures. Gratification leads to pleasure. As seen in Figure 2, making practices lead to flow which is an externally observable manifestation of making in which participants dedicate their full concentration on a task resulting in a lapse of self awareness and a loss of the sense of time (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Activation of the effort driven rewards neural circuit is the neurobiological event occurring when a person engages flow (Lambert, 2008), and the building of psychological capital is the psychological consequence of the engagement of flow (Seligman, 2004).



*Figure 2. Making practices as an extension of human well being.*

Unfortunately, in a world where we can buy things cheaper than we can make them, we often experience pleasure without gratification, as exhibited in Selgiman's (2004) orange juice example. As a result we miss out on gratification, often fail to bank psychological capital, and are lacking in resilience in the face of hardship which leads to an epidemic of depression and general decline in subjective well-being.

Further, I postulate that psychological capital has a compound interest. That is, makers continue to bank resiliency over and over, each time they see or are reminded of past successes. Unfortunately, the economic environment of Western culture disincentivizes making practices and encourages modes of economic recovery in which people discard (via gifts or selling) the products of their successes. In a world where we have a ubiquitous decline in physical effort linked to visible meaningful results, we experience lowered resiliency and compromised mental immune systems; hence the continual rise in mental disorders such as depression, suicide, and anxiety. Gratifications were once a natural byproduct of survival. Craftonomics theory postulates that we now live in a gratification

impoverished culture. We must consciously engage gratification in order to maintain mental health. Being active producers of the goods in our lives is essential for mental well-being.

## **Conclusion**

This study seeks to bring human production behaviors or making practices more into focus. It explores the intersections and interstitial spaces of human production practice, economics, education, and subjective well-being. It is essential to mine the underlying narratives of our consumer culture to help identify the drivers of the behaviors we exhibit. Unfortunately, much of the discourse in the craft community struggles with the battle of trying to negotiate the crafting lifestyle with incompatible market demands (Gill & Hampton, 2009). The craft literature does not crack the cognitive veil of the economic metanarrative. The arguments for reinstating arts education often do not embrace the beneficial advantages that engaging the arts might hold for humans. I am interested in peering behind the curtain in an attempt to further understand the narrative threads that our shared economic belief system creates. In conclusion, this research project brings together, the complex sociohistorical discussion of the art - craft binary, a transdisciplinary theory of craft practice as an extension of human well-being, and the social barriers to craft practice within market economy consumer culture toward illuminating the social complexities of craft practice in educational and life settings.

### **Chapter 3: Research Design**

#### **Epistemological Framework and Qualitative Approach**

As I am interested in garnering an understanding of complex social phenomena, qualitative methods are appropriate for collecting the data and information needed to inform my research questions. I am guided by a constructivist epistemology in which meaning is not fixed or static but rather situated in social contexts, particularly through social interactions (Guba & Lincoln, 2000). This perspective informs my keen interest in narrative inquiry and also provides a framework for my research design.

Given that my research is focused around understanding the ways that reality is socially constructed and specifically understanding how craft behaviors interact with the economic metanarrative of market economy culture, narrative inquiry is a fitting method for achieving my research goals. My focus is in “lived experience—that is, in lives and how they are lived” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxii). My purpose in using narrative inquiry comes from Connelly and Clandinin’s (2006) exploration of the methodology:

Arguments for the development and use of narrative inquiry come out of a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives. People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. (p. 147)

I recognize that qualitative research is often unpredictable. As I engaged the process of collecting data and organizing my findings with/in a developing narrative inquiry, I was aware of the importance of emerging questions or surprises which call for adjustments in methodology and analysis.

### **Research Questions**

I attempt to render a conceptual understanding of the complex social reasoning that emerges via justification narratives when those engaged in making behaviors run up against the economic metanarrative within which they reside. I further seek to understand how education intersects with making practices for my research subjects. My research is guided by three main questions. How do craft behaviors and practices contribute to well-being? What are the complexities of engaging craft behaviors, especially with respect to discursive sociocultural narratives and the economic metanarrative? What are the perceptions held by crafters about the role education has had or continues to have on their practices and beliefs related to craft?

### **Methodology**

I engaged narrative inquiry as the primary methodology for this research project; however, the inquiry is productively complicated by an A/R/Tographic perspective. I used A/R/Tography as a way to work physically with data toward knowledge creation and a deeper understanding of my subjects, their stories and the social narratives they used as makers. My research goals are informed by Rosi Braidotti's (2006) notion of the *nomadic subject* in which identity is always on the move, in a permanent state of becoming and inseparable from its multiplicity and relationality. Braidotti (2006) emphasizes that our multiplicity is not simply "a matter of weaving together different strands, but rather...a

specific theme of its own” (p. 5). I used narrative A/R/Tographic inquiry to develop a more adequate cartography of our position as nomadic subjects so that we may be able to think with/in and outside the hegemony of the economic metanarrative discourse, “modes of representation and forms of accountability that are adequate to the complexities of the real-life world I am living in” (Braidotti, 2006, p. 7).

**Narrative inquiry.** I used narrative inquiry as a means to research the ways in which makers “produce, represent, and contextualize experience and personal knowledge through narratives” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 54). In my case, I looked for narratives which illuminated the tension held between making practices and the economic metanarrative as well as narratives which addressed issues of education and well-being among crafters and makers. I used storied data to help understand “how people structure the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives” and how that meaning making drives their behavioral decisions (Schram, 2006, p. 104). Further I used narrative inquiry as a means to research the ways in which makers “produce, represent, and contextualize experience and personal knowledge through narratives” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 54). I theorized that storied data of narrative inquiry would be creatively troubled via A/R/tographic inquiry.

**A/R/Tography.** A/R/Tography is an arts-based research methodology that inquires into social phenomenon through artistic and aesthetic means (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2008). A/R/Tographic renderings methodologically reside as a living inquiry “in the space of the in-between and in doing so redefines community, knowledge and research by unsettling perception” (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2008, p. 84). I used A/R/Tographic inquiry to explore the hidden, liminal spaces of participant narratives, and to mine the depths of my own experiences as a member of the crafting community. Behavior often derives as much

from the things we don't see and say as from the things we do. For example, I created an A/R/Tographic rendering of a single phrase uttered by one of my participants; Lorraine, in a discussion of her experiences with dyslexia in the school system said, "I never felt like a very smart person." She went on to say that her making practice is where she shines. As she spoke, tears began to fall and I felt so angry that she spent many years in a system that failed to value her gifts and her creative intelligence. I felt so grateful at the same time that she found a making practice which helped illuminate those gifts and helped to establish her as valuable in the world. I moved into A/R/Tography to help process these emotions and created the image in Figure 3.



*Figure 3. Being smart.*

Figure 3 is a piece of encaustic art in which I used layers of wax with acrylic paints. I scratched the words, “I never felt like a very smart person” into the work and then used a blow torch and wax to deconstruct it. The result is a beautiful and serene abstract rendering. The letters are still visible, but the meaning is deconstructed and reconstructed in the beauty. This A/R/Tographhic rendering helped me to recognize the incredible power of making practices to heal and to contribute to wellbeing.

A/R/Tography helped reveal the interstitial data “through an inquiry process that lingers [...] inside and outside—the between—of a(artist) and r(researcher) and t(teacher)” (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2008, p. 84). A/R/Tographic inquiry provides access to the recesses of complex social interaction which helped to inform the multifarious nature of making practices. For this reason, I used A/R/Tographic inquiry as a means of enriching narrative inquiry as well as a way to think through my analysis in a non-linear fashion. A/R/Tographic inquiry “draws upon many theoretical lenses, including, philosophy, feminist theories, and contemporary art criticism, to conceptualize the methodology” and as I engaged this method, I further explored pockets of literature surrounding these areas (Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis, & Grauer, 2006, p. 1237).

I integrated A/R/Tographic data analysis techniques into my research project by creating A/R/Tographic renderings of my experience with data as a form of analysis. My reason for using A/R/Tography is that my constructivist view of reality is such that “meaning and understanding are no longer revealed or thought to emanate from a point of origin, rather they are complicated as relational, rhizomatic and singular” (Springgay, Irwin, Leggo, & Gouzouasis, 2008, p. xxi). I wanted to find a way to capture not only the teased threads of heavily coded qualitative data, but also the complicated larger rendering of our experiences.



My practice of A/R/Tography is informed by the work of Stephanie Springgay, Rita Irwin and Carl Leggo (A/R/Tographers and living inquiry, 2008; Irwin & DeCosson, 2004; Springgay, Irwin, Leggo, & Gouzouasis, 2008a), and Shaun McNiff (McNiff, 1998) among many other pioneers in this field.

I used A/R/Tographic renderings as a tool for poststructural analysis, in an effort to de-center the dominant ideologies and to make space for alternative modes of understanding/deconstructing the narratives that guide our practices. I recognize that language is an imperfect tool for conveying meaning, and I use art as a means of reconstructing the process of meaning making in an effort to deepen my understanding of the subjects I study. I attempt to avoid recreating the linear narrative shaped by storied data and narrative inquiry by creating art in response to data “without any purpose in view, allowing [myself] to be taken by surprise by any new turn” always meeting my data with an “open mind, free from presuppositions” (McNiff, 2008, p. 34).

**Data collection methods.** I collected data through in-depth individual interviews, internet questionnaires, and by creating A/R/Tographic reflections of the data collection and analysis process. I used narrative inquiry techniques as the primary interview methodology by asking open-ended questions and purposely evoking “storied data” (Schram, 2006, p. 104). For example, I asked participants to tell me stories about successes and failures they experienced while making things. I also asked participants to tell me about a specific time when they had attempted to sell something they had made. I solicited specific instances or stories to be analyzed as opposed to asking participants how they felt about making in general. I used semi-structured interviews in an effort to counteract the “fragmentation and reassembly of data” typical of many qualitative methodologies (Schram, 2006, p. 104). By

leaving data intact, I attempted to “analyze not only meanings and motives but also how those meanings and motives connect to the ways people structure their experience” (Schram, 2006, p. 105). One of the basic assumptions of narrative inquiry is that participants do not deal with the world from moment to moment, but instead that they frame these moments in “larger structures – narrative or stories- that provide a context for interpreting the meaning of these parts” (Schram, 2006, p. 105). Through the storied data, I attempted to extract the larger structures or grand narratives in which participants held beliefs about their practices.

I conducted a minimum of two hour-long semi-structured individual interviews with each of the six participants. I created recorded transcripts (via voice recording) of the interview process. I elicited stories from participants about how craft practice contributes to well-being, about the interaction between educational structures and craft practice and about the ways they have justified their craft practices. See Appendix D for a list of semi structured interview questions used in this project. I requested the opportunity to re-visit participants in the form of another formal individual interview and via email or phone conversation for follow-up questions. Glesne (2011) suggests a methodical approach to data analysis in which a researcher simultaneously analyzes and collects data. This reverberation between data collection and analysis allowed me to give focus to my study as I moved through the research process. I took the opportunity to consistently reflect on my data, worked to organize it, and tried to discover what it had to tell me as opposed to viewing “data analysis as a discrete step to be done after data collection” (Glesne, 2011, p. 188). The process of analyzing data during data collection helped inform my interview process. Each interview built on the data collected in the previous interview.

## Data Analysis

The storied quality of data—preserving, not fracturing, its essential structure—enables narrative inquirers to consider “both how social actors order and tell their experiences and why they remember and retell what they do (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 57). Narrative researchers extend their focus beyond content to include how people “package” that content and how they recount events with an audience in mind (Schram, 2006, p. 105). While I analyzed the interview data, I paid close attention not only to the story, but also to how the story was told and what emotions the stories seemed to elicit for my participants. Were the participants dismissive, excited, angered? Did they project an air of defeat or confidence? I looked for verbal and embodied cues to help inform my analysis. I recorded this data in extensive reflective note taking during and immediately after interviews.

**Coding data.** My first coding pass of individual data required leaving the data largely intact when analyzing participant interviews. I looked for rudimentary coding schemes and narrative patterns that emerged within the storied data (Glesne, 2011). I kept three records from my initial pass of individual interview coding, a process which is related to traditional coding but is also qualitatively more fluid and intuitive. My first pass was a hand written record in which I extracted thematic codes of individual interviews. My second record was a master coding of all the interviews combined into larger grand narratives. My third record was a digital re-coding of the emergent grand narratives and the individual narratives with an eye toward findings.

As with traditional coding practices, I developed narrative coding categories that illuminated the varied narratives which emerged. These coding categories eventually

developed into a coding scheme which swelled well beyond the bounds of this project. I then selected the most relevant narrative codes for further and deeper analysis and for thematic findings. I also looked at the order of the narrative and aspects of the narrative that tended to emphasize or de-emphasize themes. I engaged narrative comparison in search of the ways that each data source varied with respect to similar “events, participants, settings or word use” (Glesne, 2011, p. 187). I coded fluidly with an eye toward A/R/Tography, as well as critically, with an eye toward my research questions. I moved in and out of coding work to creating art as a reflection of that effort. Toward an aesthetic interpenetration with coding, I made special note of interesting turns of phrase, puns, subtle cues, metaphors, metonyms, and image flashes that emerged for me as I was reading. I searched for in vivo phrases, metaphors, and metonyms to help me understand and illustrate my findings.

**Interview reverberations.** I conducted preliminary analysis after each interview, taking note of interesting questions and ideas the interview generated for the participant as well as myself. I tried to weave those questions into future interviews. For example, one of my subjects began to describe her relationship to her hands, her instruments of making in an interview. The narrative produced was related to feeling capable and trusting our bodies to produce as makers. Because it was such a generative topic, I incorporated the question, “how do you feel about your hands” into later interviews. Ultimately, each interview had an impact on the interview following and the entire process had a cumulative effect, generating a final set of issues which had evolved substantially from the original set of issues. I constantly reflected on my data, working to organize it and to discover what it had to tell me, as opposed to engaging analysis as a discrete step to be fulfilled post-data collection (Glesne, 2011). I kept a reflective field log as a means toward both data analysis and idea generation

(Glesne, 2011). I attempted to collect copious notes during each interview, a practice which was awkward and sometimes seemed to distract from the interview process. Depending on the flow of the interview, I adjusted my note taking to the point that it felt comfortable.

**Online questionnaire.** I issued an online questionnaire to members of the online making community in an effort to broaden and complicate my participant interviews. I created the online questionnaire requesting storied data which I invited members of online craft retail communities to complete. It was useful as a sort of member check from the community of crafters, but also to solicit further storied data to help illuminate the issues I explored. I treated my online questionnaire as an analytical aide and an extra measure of trustworthiness in addition to being a source of data.

**Member checking.** Once I established the major themes and narrative patterns emerging in the data, I created a summary of the findings and shared them with the internet crafting community and my interview participants for comment via email. I solicited feedback to help strengthen the trustworthiness of my findings, to help assure that I was not over-reaching or missing a critical element of the data, and to resolve any emerging inconsistencies. I chose to move this level of reverberation beyond my initial interview group to a larger set of artists, crafters and makers in an effort to understand how my findings fit into the larger group of makers. I wondered if the issues resonated throughout a community of crafters.

**A/R/Tographic renderings.** Throughout the study, I created A/R/Tographic renderings in response to data collection and analysis. That is, I created A/R/Tographic renderings of the research questions, the data, my interview subjects, the analysis process, and as reflections of the emerging issues I encountered. For example, when I first began

investigating the intersections chore-art-craft continuum, I created the piece in Figures 4 and 5 to help me explore the topic.



*Figure 4. Handicraft*



*Figure 5. Close up view of Handicraft.*

The piece features hands clawing through layers of text and Braille and emerging from a sea of sewing remnants. In creating this piece, I began to realize how angry I was with the systems we have created which disincentivize making. I also began to realize how utterly trapped I felt in the discourse of economics. This piece came to represent my desire to shift

the narrative and to openly recognize the many values and benefits of being a maker despite the fact that I can often buy things cheaper than I can make them.

The A/R/Tographic renderings “address complex and often subtle interactions and [provides] an image of those interactions in ways that make them noticeable” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 3). The art I created helped open the data and analysis to better represent and understand the narrative entanglement that drives motivations, practice, and identity of makers. Through A/R/Tography, the research phases, questioning, literature exploration, data collection, and analysis fused into an indiscernible entanglement. When using A/R/Tographic inquiry, meaning is embedded and often overlapping (Irwin & DeCosson, 2004; Springgay et al., 2008a; Springgay et al., 2008b). The A/R/Tographic renderings also helped create more “adequate cartographies of our embedded and embodied positions” as makers within an economic metanarrative (Braidotti, 2006, p. 31). For example, the image of a body in motion of one of my research participants opens the reader to her grief at the loss of her dance practice.

### **Sources of Data**

There are three separate sources of data for this research project. The primary data are derived from six research participants with whom I conducted in-depth interviews. My research participants and the participant selection process are discussed in further detail in the next chapter. I used A/R/Tographic renderings both as a secondary source of data and as a means of analysis. I accessed my tertiary source of data via the online community of makers. I developed a survey and solicited the online making community. My purpose for using interviews, questionnaires and A/R/Tographic renderings as separate sources of data

was to create a triangulation of data to render a more complete representation of the complex social narratives involved in my study.

## **Participants**

I conducted interviews with six crafter participants and developed an online survey for crafters. This chapter describes my participant selection process and investigates the common learning characteristics of makers, maker development and maker environments. This chapter bridges research methods with analysis. The exploration of maker characteristics grew out of my analysis and became useful to my project in that it informs a theory of maker-based curriculum and the development of a poietic educational aesthetic. This study received exempt status from the Institutional Review Board at Appalachian State University (Appendix A).

**Selection.** I engaged a theory-based purposeful sampling for this research project. After finding participants who fit the basic criteria outlined below, I looked for participants who might have something unique to offer to my study. For example, one of my participants was in the US on a visa which prohibited her from earning income. I reasoned that she might have an interesting perspective on making practices and economics, given that she could not make money. Each of my other participants were chosen for reasons outlined in the vignettes below.

In order to participate in this study, interview subjects were actively engaged in an art-craft making practice. I decided to form my study around fiber artist/crafters whose practice was largely yarn-based work. I have a lot of personal making experience and yarn work is one of the few areas in which I have never ventured. I chose this discipline in an effort to remove some of my personal subjectivity from the project. I also selected



individuals who were available for extensive interviews and follow-up interview sessions. My participant pool included female crafters who were actively engaged in a making practice as a lifestyle (a regular hobby) or livelihood (from which they produce income). I chose to limit my study to females because craft has often been demoted as women's work, and because I am interested in the ways that craft might help negotiate gender bias and domesticity. Further, as discussed in the literature review, I anticipated that the economic aspects of craft production would figure into household income discussions which are entangled with both the economic metanarrative and gender construction.

My interview participants included six fiber craft makers located in the southern Appalachian region. My intention was to conduct in-depth interviews with participants in an effort to more fully understand the complex economic, educational and social complexities to making practices and then look at those issues more broadly within the online crafting community. In advance of data collection, I identified a number of potential participants. I limited my face-to-face interviews to members of my local community as opposed to conducting virtual interviews which would have limited my ability to pick up on subtle conversational cues that contribute to meaning. I used local crafting community organizations to locate my participants.

**Vignettes.** For each participant, I have created a participant vignette along with a justification for inclusion in this study. Through conversational inquiry among crafting groups, I discovered qualities about each of my participants and purposefully selected them based on those qualities. In addition, I tried to vary some of the basic demographics. The participant age range was 20-50 years old with two participants 20-30 years old, two participants 30-40 years old, and two participants 40-50 years old. Two of my participants

were married with grown children, two were married with young children, and two were married with no children. Each of my participants engaged a yarn craft-art as a primary making practice, but they also had varied secondary making practices. I asked my participants to create pseudonyms to protect their privacy in this document. While I chose each of my participants purposefully, I could not have predicted what each of them had to tell me about my subject. I chose each participant for a reason; however, the most valuable insights from the participants were often unrelated to the reasons I chose them. My experience with participant selection renders my view of qualitative research as inherently unpredictable.

*Stavinga.* The first participant I chose for my study was Stavinga. Upon engaging her in conversation as a potential participant, I quickly learned that Stavinga was in the US on a Visa which prohibited her from laboring for money. Stavinga's spouse was working in the United States on an extended work visa. Stavinga had moved to a small town in the south and quickly taken up an art-craft practice as a way of engaging other locals and to create a supportive community. Stavinga is quick to point out that her craft practices are a social outlet which has become an important element of her life in her small town. Stavinga's children were born in the United States and she expresses a greater need for her craft practice since her children have begun to create greater demands on her time.

During my first interview with Stavinga, I arrived midday at her house. The two children were eating and playing while Stavinga managed a household clearly overrun by the demands of having two small children. I related to her instantly. The interview tapes are littered with the pauses that children require, including a hiatus in which Stavinga needed to put the younger child down for her nap. We sat at Stavinga's kitchen table during the

interview. She fed her children while we talked. Once the children were napping and the bulk of the interview was over, Stavinga graciously pulled out some samples of her work, which turned out to be mostly works in progress, as she had given away many of her earlier pieces. Stavinga referred me to her blog where most of her work was archived. While I was with Stavinga, a woman from her church showed up to inscribe a quilt block dedicated for a member of their congregation undergoing cancer treatments. It was rewarding for me to witness the interaction between Stavinga and the other parishioner as they discussed the creation of the prayer quilt.

***Mara.*** The first time I met Mara, she walked into the room using a cane and a back brace. She had beautiful tattoos of birds on her arms and shoulders and a green mohawk. I knew she was an artist. After we got talking, she told me all about her knitting and the medical condition which left her in chronic pain. She was very interested in the part of my dissertation to do with well-being and craft behaviors as she strongly believed that her own making practice had the power to keep her pain at bay. I invited her into my study with open arms and she easily accepted. We met for our first interview in a crowded coffee house where we talked for hours about her upbringing, her experience with different making disciplines, her relationship to art, and the dance of pain and body modification. I asked her how having a troubled body interacted with her body modification. She said,

I think I have a body that I can't control, so I can't convince it to heal itself. I can't convince it to not get hurt, so instead, the tattoos partly are something that I can – like I can be directly responsible for how it heals and how it looks in the end.

The beautiful tattoos covering her body were clearly psychologically healing for her, which convinced me that she was an appropriate subject for my study.

*Estanislada.* Estanislada was the third participant to join my study. When I first met this woman, I noticed her boisterous laugh and huge smile. She had a graceful gait coupled with a powerful presence in the room. She was just beginning to take up knitting and was seeking help from more senior members of the group. I thought she would be a nice addition to the study because she seemed to be a beginner and might be able to offer insight about what it is like to start a practice as an adult as opposed to being brought up in it. I did not know until we began talking that she had been a Flamenco dancer from the age of four until her adulthood. Estanislada's passion was so keenly focused on her dancing that all other endeavors paled in comparison to the sparkle in her eye when she discussed her body's marriage to the music.

I started really getting into it when I was about eight years old, cause you know you're wearing make-up, and your hair is done, and you have this pretty dress on, and you understand the dance moves more, and the music is starting to cling to you almost. I definitely felt very happy and it was always a good time. Our dance teachers, they start to teach you about the music, and a lot of it is acoustic guitar and you're just kind of like listening to the music. I mean there are times we had class where we just sat there and listened to the music and you just you learn to feel it and you learn to feel that passion in the music.... I have to say by ten years old I loved it. It was fun. But by the time I was a teenager, I just got more and more passionate about it the more I danced and the more I got into it. And I loved it. I loved it with all my heart.

Estanislada was a semi-professional dancer when she had her car accident:

It happened on a Friday and I was down and out for quite a while. I had a lot of hate toward this girl, the girl who caused the accident. I just, I was not in a very good place in my mind.

Estanislada lost her passion, her career, her ability to walk, her independence, everything, on a Friday afternoon. She had to drop out of school, her car was totaled, she used all her savings trying to recuperate, she had to move in with her parents and depend on them for everything, even bathing. “I felt like everything was crushed,” she said. Astonishingly, she went on to tell me,

I have to say, that car accident, it’s probably one of the best things that ever happened to me because my life probably would have never changed. I probably would have never learned the true things about life if that didn’t happen to me.

*Lorraine.* When I asked Lorraine to be a participant in my study, I did so because she reminded me so much of myself. I saw in her the polymath that I believe myself to be. Her primary art-craft practice is yarn work, but she is best described as a dabbler. She will attempt almost any form. She is a true maker, mastering a skill and tucking it away to be used in concert with the many other skills she gains. When I first began talking with her about possibly being a participant, she told me she enjoys making things and that she tends to really dive into a new type of making, and once having produced some successful pieces, often moves on to a new type of making. I appreciated her passion for making. It was very different than the type of passion I found in Estanislada, for example, in which one discipline of making is so much more privileged than any other.

I had no idea upon asking her to join my study that Lorraine would contribute a story so relevant to education and well-being. Lorraine has dyslexia, and she spent many of her

formative years skipping art and music for dyslexic program classes. When I asked Lorraine how her life would be different without her making practice, she responded,

I think I would feel a lot worse about myself, because I take a lot of pride in my craft and I never felt like a very smart person – I’m not book smart at all and so that’s what I have is my craft...it’s where I shine.

**Molly.** I asked Molly to join my study mostly because I had been invited to one of her plays. Her primary making practice is yarn craft, but she is also an active thespian performing in multiple plays a year. I wanted to introduce a variety of art - craft practice in addition to a common thread of yarn crafts among my participants. Also, I knew that being in plays is an inherently collaborative process and I wondered if Molly might have valuable insights to offer with respect to art-craft practice in community. Finally, I was astounded by the quality of Molly’s yarn craft technique. She is, by far, one of the most talented makers that I have ever met. She ended up informing the way I think about craft practice by contributing to the development of a slow hunch for me. She opened a discussion of her caring for her family in aesthetic ways and it occurred to me that perhaps art-craft practices emerge as an extension of caring for people, a notion that was later expanded with Dissanayake’s (2009) exploration of artification. Molly said,

Like it’s just like a little step further. Like making a bed of hay or whatever, so that you can be comfortable. And it’s a little step further to line it with wood and – you know? Like maybe that aesthetic grows out of nurturing and caring for people [and making things nice for them and for ourselves].

Before that moment, I had not considered the emergence of art practice as a spandrel of an aesthetic of care. Molly had a deep appreciation for beauty in the natural world and she

worked to honor and recreate “the teeny tiny things about nature and how things are put together.” I felt in Molly’s interview a great respect for and longing even for the gentle art of domesticity. Her making practice genuinely emerges from her great appreciation for the beauty of the natural world.

***Maeve.*** Maeve was my sixth interview participant. I knew that Maeve’s yarn practice was extensive and that she, like Lorraine, was a bit of a polymath when it came to making. I knew, for example, that she had been worked diligently on many remodeling projects which moved outside the bounds of some of the other maker experiences of the women in the local craft groups. Further, I knew that Maeve was actively pursuing a business idea based on one of her making practices. I wanted to see how that business plan emerged and how it got executed over the course of my dissertation work. I wanted to follow her progress and try to gauge the impact of her practice merging with economics in such a direct way. In some ways, Maeve’s interview was the most difficult for me. I so clearly identified with her efforts to create working business model based on her making practice. I anticipated the disappointments that I later saw her experience and experienced my own disappointments again in the process. I felt such a kinship with her as she worked her way through her business idea.

**Maker survey.** In addition to the indepth interviews, I invited female craft bloggers and internet retailers to respond to an online survey. I engaged the online craft community via [www.etsy.com](http://www.etsy.com), an e-commerce website focused on handmade items, as well as art and craft supplies. I selected female retailers who had listed handmade items on Etsy and sent them an introductory note along with a hyperlink to the survey. I chose Etsy vendors who were featured on the recently listed items page. I approached 63 online crafters to complete

the survey from which I garnered 26 respondents. Of those 26 participants, the majority considered themselves both online business owners and homemakers. They ranged in age from 21 to 65 and self-identified as female. I invited crafters to participate via email; however, I further limited that pool by only using data from participants who self-identified as female. Two of the 26 participants had graduated from high school and all of the remaining participants had some college experience, the majority of whom graduated from college. Ninety percent of the blog participants were married or in a relationship with a significant other. Eighty-nine percent of the blog participants practiced some type of fiber art/craft practice along with many other disciplines of making. My purpose in engaging the online crafting community was twofold. I hoped to member check the data collected from my interview participants with the crafting community at large, and I hoped to help illuminate the findings with robust storied data from online participants. I asked questions in the survey that would elicit intact stories of crafting experiences as opposed to questions that would elicit analysis from respondents. Many of the online crafters were either supplementing income or selling their crafts as a primary income. The survey solicited crafting narratives via storytelling. I solicited individual crafters via the messaging systems within the Etsy online craft community. I invited craft bloggers to send stories in writing via Survey Monkey which includes Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) enabled technology data protection, masked IP addresses, and US Section 508 certified compliance. The crafters invited to complete the survey were not limited by geography.

### **Ethical Considerations**

There are few risks associated with this study. Anonymous responses and collective generalizations preserved the identities of my study participants. Further, the subject



explored is not of the nature that private emotional issues or psychological problems commonly emerged; however, in order to minimize the potential risks, respondents were anonymous. Both positive and negative narratives emerged during the research process and I understand the vulnerability that my research participants may have experienced as a result of partaking in this study.

While there are no tangible advantages to participating in this study, there are potential indirect benefits. The topic I explored is of particular interest to many who engage making practices. Exploring the narratives which emerge within the economic framework reveals how other beneficial narratives are subverted. By revealing the inequity in privileging one narrative over another, makers justify the exploration of making practices outside of the privileged economic metanarrative. Further, this research has implications for schooling and educational practices in which making practices have been largely marginalized. Finally, this study has theoretical contributions to a variety of fields including Expressive Arts Therapy, Positive Psychology, Behavioral Economics and Craft Studies.

I made a strong effort to protect participant data. Participant privacy was protected and identifying information was removed from all data and publications. The online questionnaire exchange took place entirely via Survey Monkey data protection encrypted software. Transcripts and recordings of participant data were kept in password protected computer files at all times. Further, I followed the guidelines set forth by the Institutional Review Board throughout my research project.

In order to protect the privacy of online participants, I enabled the Survey Monkey SSL encryption feature which encrypts sensitive data as it moves along the communication pathways between the participants' computers and Survey Monkey servers. I also enabled an

IP address masking feature in the Survey Monkey Software. I offered a “no response” or “prefer not to answer” option for each question in accordance with participant rights to withhold information. I also offered participants the option to withdraw from the survey at the end. Survey Monkey Data servers have strict environmental and physical controls in place to protect data. Finally, within the informed consent of the survey, I notified participants that while I will do everything possible to protect information volunteered, no form of electronic communication is entirely secure.

### **Credibility and Trustworthiness**

In an effort toward developing trustworthiness, I employed a variety of procedures in this research project. I checked transcripts to make sure that they did not contain mistakes in transcription. I also included both physical gestures and spontaneous verbal emissions (such as laughter) embedded within the transcript to help avoid misinterpretation or skewed meaning from participant interviews. I used member checking with respect to the emerging substantive theory via online critical commentary. I used “rich, thick description to convey the findings” in an effort to “transport readers to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experiences” (Creswell, 2009, p. 191). I also included snippets of the narrative data in an effort to add to the depth of this shared experience. I used memos of subjectivity and self-reflection to help reveal researcher bias. Ultimately, these efforts add to the value of my overall study.

### **Study Transferability**

As I engaged this study, I recognized that the limited number of participants necessarily limited my findings to a particular time and place with particular subjects; however, through the triangulation of data, I make an effort to move my study beyond the

bounds of the Appalachian community of makers within which my participants reside. Ultimately, although members of crafting communities in market economies have likely engaged similar narratives, the findings of this study are limited to the participants of this study. Findings about the narratives that emerge in market economies could hold potential transferability to researchers seeking a better understanding of the characteristics and qualities of behaviors within the economic metanarrative. This study helps guide future researchers who wish to explore behaviors impacted by the economic metanarrative and provides a better understanding of the narrative structure of experience with respect to making practices which function with/in the economic metanarrative. Further, this study contributes to a conversation among educational theorists about the value of maker-based curriculums in school systems.

## Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

This chapter teases out the narratives which emerged during my research project and analyzes those findings for the intersections of human production practice with well-being, economics and education. The research questions circle around the three main issues of craft practice in relationship to well-being, economics and education. The research questions that guided this work were: How do making practices contribute to **well-being**? What are the complexities of engaging making practices, especially with respect to discursive sociocultural narratives and the **economic** metanarrative? What are the perceptions held by makers about the role **education** has had or continues to have on their practices and beliefs related to art/craft/making? In this chapter, I present the emergent narratives of makers in relationship to well-being and economics and posit the implications and interactions with education. This research contributes a body of knowledge surrounding these domains.

The emergent narratives contribute broadly to each of the research questions; however, I have discussed them largely in the context of specific questions. In relationship to well-being, I discuss the well-being narrative, essence narratives, appreciation narratives, addiction narrative, and the artist narrative. In relationship to economics, I discuss the economic narrative, the gender narrative, the gifting narrative, and the *just-in-case* narrative. In relationship to education, I discuss the educational experiences of my participants through two modes of learning, including the culture commons (intergenerational knowledge and

informal educational settings) and autodidactic learning. I also discuss the common learning characteristics and development of makers.

### **Maker Narratives**

Each of the emerging maker narratives are taken up by makers as a way of justifying, understanding, and constituting their making practices. Being a maker is often costly with respect to time and resources, yet Western culture is undergoing a maker revolution (Hatch, 2013). This research explores the narratives used to justify the deep commitment makers have to being producers in a culture that readily discourages frivolous use of resources. I found nine narratives created by and acting upon my participants. While I have explored them as separate, the narratives interact with each participant in different ways, in relationship to one another, and in relationship to each of my research questions.

**Well-being narratives.** My grandmother always called woodworking her therapy. She attended classes at the local Community College for more than 30 years, every fall, spring and summer session. She attended because she loved building furniture and because it fulfilled her and enabled her to flourish. Many of the well-being narratives I found among my participants, I recognized having seen them in my grandmother and having felt them during the eight years I accompanied her to woodworking classes. A discussion of the well-being narratives I encountered follows, including the well-being narrative, essence narratives, appreciation narratives, addiction narrative, and the artist narrative

***Self care.*** Each of my participants expressed an unmitigated belief that their craft practices were fundamentally healthy and added psychological value to their lives. This finding is consistent with an international qualitative study in which researchers found knitting to be beneficial for personal and social well-being in adulthood (Riley, Corkhil, &

Morris, 2013; Utsch, 2007). Molly repeatedly told me that she used her knitting to relieve stress and “recharge her batteries.” Mara told me that she used yarn crafts as a “rhythmic dulling of the cognitive chatter.” Lorraine told me that her craft is intertwined with her self esteem; “I would have felt a lot worse about myself” without my practice. Stavinga went so far as to say her crafting “keeps her sane” and that she takes classes for her “mental health.” Estanislada reflected on her experiences with depression and pain with the comment, “I always feel better if I make something.” Maeve discussed her nightly knitting by saying “my craft fills me up.”

The online craft questionnaire reinforced the notion that makers hold a keen awareness of their craft practices as beneficial to their lives and as a process of self care. Many of the respondents referred to their crafting as an escapist measure to de-compress after challenging encounters with children or stressful work environments. I asked my online participants to respond with a story that would illustrate the degree to which their making practice contributed to their well-being. One woman responded to the question with the following:

My mother passed away a couple of weekends ago right in the middle of midterm week. I tried very hard to concentrate on my homework and studying for my midterms but found it impossible. I was being overwhelmed with questions and people wanting to know information about my mother’s funeral (which even I didn’t know the answers to at the time) and also with people demanding money at every turn for one expense or another for my mother’s arrangements, all the while taking care of my two small children and trying to figure out how to explain to them that grandma was gone. I decided I had to take a little time for myself. I sent my children to spend

some time with their dad (we are divorced) and I sat at my sewing machine and started creating. It was such a relief to not have to think about all of the proper things and to just take some time for me. I truly believe that my crafting is what is keeping me sane at this time.

This was one of many similar stories to emerge. It became clear early on in my research that makers inherently value their practices as contributions to their well-being.

There is a strong historical precedent for the promotion of hobbies as a source of well-being among children and adults in early 20th century United States ( Brown, 1948; Frances, 1937; Hobbies, 1913; Kentworthy, 1935; Sherwood, 1944). Unfortunately, among my participants, I found the well-being narrative is often subverted by the economic metanarrative in which we are driven towards selling or limiting production as a means of financial resource recovery. For example, Estanislada made jewelry for many years, a practice which helped her escape depression following her debilitating car accident. She sold the jewelry and used selling it as a justification for making as opposed to using the well-being narrative. When she no longer had a market for her jewelry, she abandoned the practice, forfeiting its profound impact on her well-being. Even now, many years later, she searches for a market so she can make jewelry again; the economic narrative has so overpowered the well-being narrative that she simply cannot justify the practice despite having the resources to do so.

I found that the pressure to bow to the economic metanarrative is often enacted through the maker. That is, the maker puts pressure on herself to become an economic producer; albeit, there are many cultural in vivo phrases used when showing appreciation for a maker's skills which reinforce the idea of creating an economic return. As makers, we

often compliment one another with phrases such as *you could sell those* or *people would buy those*, inadvertently reinforcing a maker's desire to recover costs in a culture that values production primarily via economics as opposed to well-being. The terms *what I want to do* or *how to make a living* in our culture are often used economically and create cognitive shortcuts to an economic metanarrative which sometimes overpowers the other narratives we may use to justify being a maker.

Similarly, I found that Molly used the terms happy and productive almost synonymously throughout my interviews. The implication is that one must be productive in order to be happy. I suspect this is a consequence of living within an economic metanarrative in which productivity is usually cased in economic terms and is highly valued; however, I also wonder if the biological consequence of being productive leads to well-being as is suggested in Lambert's (2008) neuroscientific analysis of depression and well-being via effort driven rewards in which the terms productive and happy might be appropriately synonymous. Lambert's (2008) analysis is reinforced by Martell and Dimidjian's (2010) work with behavioral activation therapy and Seligman's (2011) work in positive psychology which suggests that an element of flourishing is engagement. Seligman's (2011) idea of engagement is based on Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) notion of flow, a concept often tied to deep engagement of a hobby or making practice. The benefits of being a maker to mental health and subjective well-being are plentiful but are sometimes subverted via the economic metanarrative. There are ways to feel good about your making practices and sell items at the same time, and my research suggests that it may have to do with finding ways to maintain the social value of your work in the marketplace, an idea further discussed in the section dealing with economics.



Participants repeatedly discussed the elements of crafting which they thought contributed to their well-being. They noted that time spent crafting helped to “recharge their batteries.” That is, they considered the time to be relaxing and restorative, and they reported that making things relieved tension and reduced stress, a finding consistent with the literature (Utsch, 2007). They reported feeling confident and proud when their making practice led them to engage complicated problem solving. Makers experience reward in being able to imagine how to construct items they encounter. Further, the makers I interviewed reported exploring the work of others primarily in service of their own practice, not simply for appreciation or aesthetic experience. When I asked Stavinga about art quilts, she responded with the fact that she does not like them. I pressed the issue and she told me that she much preferred traditional block quilts “because I can figure out how to do it maybe. The quilts I bookmark are the one’s I might attempt.” When I asked her to think of a difficult quilt that she had admired but would not attempt, she was unable to do so. As she develops skill, her appreciation of more complex quilts will likely expand as well. The things makers admire in the art they seek, is often a technique they can imagine realized in their own work. It is a form of art viewing as inspiration.

Participants repeatedly noted using crafts as a way of escaping depression. In two of the instances, participants were experiencing deep unrelenting depression and credited a craft behavior for pulling them out of the depression. In both instances the craft behavior was instigated by concerned family members which may indicate a social aspect of depression mitigation. Estanislada’s sister dragged her out of the house and helped her begin to make jewelry, and Lorraine’s mother enrolled the two of them in a pottery class.

My mom – I guess she could tell how depressed I was and she had been looking into a pottery class at the community college so she encouraged me to go do that with her. So, she and I did this little pottery class. It was the instructor's last year doing it. All we did was basically hand building no wheel, and he spent most of his time with the advanced students and we were just there on the side. It was good because it started getting me out of my depression.

While participants discussed multiple reasons they felt the crafting “snapped” them out of a depression “like flipping a switch,” Lambert’s (2008) effort driven rewards theory predicts this neurobiological consequence to crafting. Behavioral activation theory (Martell & Dimidjian, 2010). also supports this finding. Ample research suggests that engaging and manipulating the physical world toward productive means should have an impact on depression (Dissanayake, 1992; Lambert, 2008; Martell & Dimidjian, 2010; Seligman, 2011; Smith, 2002). As Smith (2002) suggests, depression may be an evolved psychological trait in which the hallmarks of depression may be advantageous behavioral strategies under specific ecological conditions. For example, reduced activity might be advantageous in times of scarcity and reduction in food resources. In addition a reduction of competitive social interactions might be advantageous in a high conflict environment with many strong competitors. It is easy to see how countless precipitating events might lead to the onset of depression as an evolved reaction to scarcity and high conflict settings, like those experienced in highly competitive economic environments in which income gaps are large (Wilkinson, 2010). Further, as Lambert (2008) describes in effort driven rewards theory and as Martell & Dimidjian (2010), and many others (Elliot, 2012; Hopko, Magidson, & Lejuez, 2011; Vallance, Winkler, Gardiner, Healy, Lynch, & Owen, 2011) describe in behavioral

activation therapy, manipulating the physical environment toward productive means and becoming physically interactive with the world might help flip that evolutionary switch by shifting a neurological pathways and essentially jumpstarting the non-depressive neural path resulting in psychological alleviation of depressive symptoms.

My participants' credited the feeling of accomplishment and a renewed sense of confidence for the change in their mental states. While participants acknowledged the value of the social setting in which they engaged making practices, they largely credited the change in their mental states to being a maker. These psychological and cognitive experiences align with Seligman's (2004) theory in which subjects experience gratification leading to psychological capital which then fortifies them with resilience against depression. Seligman's (2004) gratification theory and Martell and Dimidjian's (2010) behavioral activation therapy both work as psychological counterparts to Lambert's (2008) neurobiological theory of effort driven rewards.

As described earlier, Estanislada experienced a devastating loss followed by a deep depression. She had been a Flamenco dancer since she was five years old and had built an entire life and career around dancing when she was in a car accident that destroyed her foot. Estanislada donned one of her Flamenco dresses to give me a sense of her skill and beauty as a dancer, a sense of what she lost (Figure 6).



*Figure 6.* Estanislada duende.

Her heartbreaking story has a watershed moment in which she began to imagine a new way for her life to be of value. That moment was precipitated by making jewelry. Her identity as a Flamenco dancer was all encompassing. She spoke with elaborate hand gestures when talking about her dancing career and she used the word “love” over 50 times during the

interview which was largely dominated by a discussion of overcoming physical and emotional pain. Her love refrain was often in chorus, “I loved it. I loved it with all my heart. I loved it so much.” She was in a wheelchair for a year after her accident:

The first six months were the hardest, I just, I was not in a very good place in my mind. I didn’t want to be around anybody. I never told anybody this, but you know, I used to take Tylenol PM all day long because I didn’t want to be awake.

When I asked Estanislada how she came out of her depression, she responded:

It started it started because my older sister Debbie, she called me and asked what I was doing. I told her that I was asleep, I didn’t want to go anywhere, I didn’t want to do anything. And she said well, you’re gonna wake up and you’re gonna get dressed and I’m gonna to go pick you up and you’re gonna come to my house and we’re gonna make jewelry. And I was like oh my god...jewelry? Are you kidding me?

She finally “snapped out” of the deep depression she experienced when her sister forced her to her home to make jewelry. Her description of the events is evidence of the reward she felt after having engaged making:

By the end of the day, I had made three necklaces and a bracelet. I *had made* all that [and I] I felt good that I could do something with my hands and still keep my mind working. And it’s almost like I snapped. I snapped out of like whatever I was going through, and I don’t know, I embraced it [and] everything just snapped. I was like, why am I doing this to myself? I almost felt like I had a self-worth back, like I could do something.

Estanislada used the term “buoyancy” and the metaphor of keeping her head above water to describe her jewelry making. The loss of her dancing practice and its resulting

crippling depression is as much an indication of the value of craft as the jewelry that helped pull her from those depths of despair. Clearly making was a powerful tool to help this subject be resilient in the face of depression.

My research participants repeatedly noted that they love to look at the things they've made. Seligman (2004) identifies the psychological capital that makers experience when they produce something of value in the world. An element of my craftonomics theory, which is built on Seligman's (2004) theory, is that gratification has a compound interest which continues to build psychological capital over time. Lambert (2008) acknowledges this notion through a discussion of her grandmother who used canned vegetables to supplement family meals throughout the year; "each meal provided strong and delicious reminders of the consequences of her past efforts" (p. 40). The makers I interviewed kept very little of the things they had made. They had given away almost everything they had made, often in pursuit of acknowledgement and appreciation of their skills or in pursuit of economic justification for their practices; however, the theory suggests that makers might be better served psychologically by keeping and prominently displaying the fruits of their labors. Dissanayake (1992) posited that we may have developed an evolutionary reward system to encourage making behaviors (which prehistorically often lead to survival) and Lambert (Lambert, 2006, 2008) makes an effort to identify the neurobiology of that reward system. Seligman (2004) and Csikszentmihalyi (1990) describe the psychology of the reward system. My research participants describe the experience of the reward system. As my research subjects discussed moving objects around from room to room to stare at it after completion, I was reminded of how good I feel each time I notice a lamp I built while pregnant with my

youngest child. The lamp has a cherry base which I turned on a lathe and a walnut stand with a cherry in-lay.



*Figure 7.* Cherry and walnut lamp.

Building the lamp was rewarding and felt wonderful at the time of production, and that feeling did not go away for me. I feel good every time I look at it. What a loss that would be if I had given away that lamp. I continue to garner psychological capital and build resilience as I repeatedly notice the objects that I have created. The way my research participants described their experiences leads me to believe that they too continually experience that gratification. Estanislada described the experience of completing a project as follows; “when you work on something and you finish it and you’re like—gasp—look at this great thing I

made and you want to keep looking at it.” It is such a wonderful feeling and I think we have the capacity to experience it over and over. When we remove these items that lead to gratification and psychological capital from our line of sight, we lose the opportunity to be continually filled psychologically with the fruits of our labors.

My research participants tended to give away their greatest successes in search of appreciation which does lead to gratification; however, if we kept those objects we might net a total greater gratification over time. My findings support this theoretical construct. Participants reported feeling good and being excited upon seeing an object that they had made and previously given away. Unfortunately, most of my participants did not even have objects they could show me because they had kept so little of their products over time. Revisiting our accomplishments becomes difficult when we are not surrounded by them.

Crafting was universally considered a social endeavor by my participants. That is, participants reported using crafts as a means of creating a social network in a community. They felt that the social contact they made via crafting was both enjoyable and important to their personal mental health. Further, when participants explained why their partners felt their making practice was valuable, they attributed it to a combination of purpose and social value.

Being a maker is intertwined with self esteem and identity. While makers often feel unworthy of labeling themselves in disciplines related to high art, they openly claim being makers and having skill which lends them confidence and raises their overall subjective well-being. Participants reported that making practices such as knitting both dulled the cognitive chatter through a sense of absent-mindedness or mindlessness, and paradoxically, made room for cognitive processing or mindfulness. For example, some participants claimed that time



spent making something worked to distract them from the stress or anxiety they were facing which is consistent with anxiety avoidance theory (Borkovec, 2004). Essentially, a person experiencing generalized anxiety disorder or other undesirable emotions or thoughts, may attempt to avoid the experience via distraction. Theories of experiential avoidance predict that practices which successfully enable a person to avoid anxiety will be negatively reinforced, increasing the likelihood that the behaviors will continue over time (Hayes, Wilson, Gifford, Follette, & Strosahl, 1996). This may begin to explain the addiction narrative which emerged throughout my data collection process. Alternatively, participants also reported that knitting gave them the cognitive space to think through and work out problems they were facing. In both instances, “poring over a scrapbook project or knitting a sweater may [...] engage your brain in intense ways that are beneficial to your mental health” Lambert (2008, p. 45).

My research suggests that autodidacticism may be a function of well-being. Participants repeatedly expressed feelings of gratification, confidence, and enjoyment when describing autodidactic moments in their making practices. Further, when discussing autodidactic experiences, participants continually emphasized phrases that promote independence, “all by myself,” “wholly on my own,” “without any help from anyone,” and “completely mine.” There was a strong sense of pride and accomplishment associated with autodidactic learning. Further, participants described being driven to realize an idea and diving deeply into inquiry-based learning as a result. Wilhelm (2007) developed an arc of inquiry to describe inquiry-based learning in which learning is driven by a desire to understand something specific and results in the development and acquisition of applicative knowledge. Participants recounted the experience of researching (inquiry-based learning)

and attempting new projects (experiential learning) in glowingly positive terms. The positive reward was enhanced when the fruits of that labor were viable. As they described arriving at fruitful products, they recounted many disappointments and errors which ultimately failed to stymie their progress. I am left wondering if something inherent to autodidactic learning provides a greater motivation to persevere in the face of failure.

Finally, making practices may have implications for the treatment of chronic pain. Mara and Estanislada both experience chronic pain. Both subjects reported feeling less physical and emotional pain while involved in making things. Additionally, they reported sometimes feeling no pain at all while working intensely. There are multiple therapeutic knitting organizations which claim the use of knitting as a bilateral rhythmic psychosocial intervention to ameliorate the effects of living with chronic pain; however, further research is warranted (Australian Pain Management Association, 2013; McDougall, 2012; The Home of Therapeutic Knitting, n.d.; Therapeutic Knitting, n.d.).

***Essence.*** Makers have an interesting relationship to the objects they create. There is a sense of ownership which stays with the creator even after the object leaves the creator. I found that maker labor is both personal and permanent and that it remains with an object. This finding supports the craftonomics theory in that the compound return on the investment of labor is also permanent. As I experienced through the continual interaction with my lamp, each view of the object is a reminder of the consequences of past efforts (Lambert, 2008).

Makers report that the things they create contain an essence or a spiritual quality. My participants universally acknowledged their ability to infuse an object with spiritual qualities (e.g., love, gratitude, energy, healing, prayer). They often reported that objects are imbued with a “me-ness” by virtue of containing or being comprised of their time and labor.

Interestingly, one of the spiritual qualities held by handmade objects is temporal.

Participants repeatedly reported that objects could hold time; “It has my time and energy in it.” Also, participants reported recalling what was happening around them when they were creating an object when they look at the object at a later date. One participant reported being able to associate sections of an audio book with sections of an afghan.

When asking Molly about her knitting practice, I noted that she could probably purchase sweaters cheaper than she could knit them, considering the price of yarn and the time investment. She immediately agreed and expressed why she persisted with making things despite being able to buy them cheaper than she could make them. Our exchange went as follows:

**Molly:** I guess I feel like it’s personal. I mean even if two people knit a scarf with the exact same yarn, it wouldn’t be the same, you know? It would look different because of the individuals doing it.

**Interviewer:** What if they looked exactly the same?

**Molly:** They would still be different.

**Interviewer:** What if you recreated a scarf exactly that was for sale at [a department store], and you bought the [department store] scarf and you put it on the chair along with yours?

**Molly:** I’d still wear mine over the other one.

**Interviewer:** Tell me about that.

**Molly:** Because it’s – I’ve spent blood, sweat and tears making it. I mean I spent my time to make it or to make it and give away to somebody.

Molly's insistence that her scarf would be different from an identical scarf was when I first began to notice the idea that makers thought of their products as being imbued with an essence.

I found that maker objects are infused with degrees of authorship, degrees to which the object was created independently by the maker. For example, Stavinga extrapolated the degree to which a quilt contained her essence based on the amount of independent thought that went into the quilt; "I own it more, it's more mine, more me," more infused with my essence. If she created a quilt using a pattern which suggests specific fabrics, thread colors, and thread patterns, the quilt is *less hers*. However, if she takes some authorship of the project by selecting her own fabrics, or a different thread pattern, or by altering the shapes and sizes of the quilt blocks, the quilt is *more hers*. The more design changes the quilter makes, the more authorship the quilter claims. I have begun to use the term authenticity when referring to degrees of authorship. The more independently the maker creates, the more authenticity the maker objects contain. Objects with a high degree of authenticity or authorship have more of the author's essence. It is clear that authenticity is a result of a more mature maker practice. I want to note that all maker objects are authentically produced, but that they do maintain a continuum of authorship, essence or authenticity. That is, makers assign a personal-ness to objects based on the labor, investment and authenticity the object contains, all ephemeral qualities.

The essence of an object can differentiate two objects that are otherwise exactly the same. Molly's sweater example from above indicates that two objects identical in minute detail are inherently different based on their essences. One object maintains an ineffable quality (what Molly called her "blood, sweat, and tears") and is ultimately different. It has

an essence which maintains value to the creator. Further, the method of recreating an object exactly makes a difference. For example, if a maker recreates an object using someone else's written instructions, it has a lesser degree of authorship than if the creator problem solves and figures out how to recreate the object independently. Problem solving further imbues an object with essence.

An object varies in degree of essence from buying a silk handbag to growing your own silk worms and making the silk to create a handbag. There is a greater sense of essence in a product that is authentically produced from start to finish. We feel more authentic, the more independently we produce. Further, there is an urge to produce authentically. As predicted in the craftonomics theory and borne out in the work examining depression by Seligman (2011) and Lambert (2008), fruitful authentic production creates a sense of well-being. Mara described her work as an extension of her soul.

In some instances I found that labor can be stripped from an object through degrees of removal. The object loses social value (essence) with each removal. Among interview participants, I found that applying a price to a product tended to devalue it in the eyes of the maker. Makers priced objects relative to what the market would bear. For example, Lorraine made candles and sold them in a store.

At that time, I felt like I shouldn't be selling anything because I was just kind of playing around in my kitchen. I was very concerned about the quality. They all worked well and they all put off the aroma. I guess it's just compared to going to some place that has very professional looking products and at that time it was in jelly jars and they didn't look professional.

She was selling the candles for less than comparable mass produced candles “Because they [weren’t] professional.”

The makers I interviewed tended to devalue their work economically if it showed any error or idiosyncrasy. They felt error was acceptable in gifting, and that it sometimes added value because it made the object more personal because it was imbued with essence. One simple way I found to remove social value (personal or essence) is to apply a market value. This finding is consistent with the social and market norms theory (Clark & Mills, 1979) from the literature review. For example, when gifting an item, the maker’s labor was always calculated as part of the gift; however, when selling an item, the price is based on the market and the labor may or may not be calculated. Both Estanislada and Lorraine used a materials cost factor to price their wares. They did not use labor or time investment as factors for selling objects. I found this interesting because Lorraine spoke of her time as precious when creating objects for gifting, yet she considered it having no value when pricing objects for selling. I think this discrepancy is related to her objects being sold to people she does not know, where she loses social value in the transaction. It is no longer personal or imbued with essence.

Another way to remove the essence of an object is to pass it to someone who doesn’t appreciate the labor involved; however, you can mitigate this loss, to some extent, by passing it to the person in the presence of people who do appreciate the labor. A maker gains social value when the fruits of her labor are exhibited in settings where people appreciate them. If Stavinga gives a quilt to someone who does not appreciate it, but she does so in the presence of lots of avid quilters, the experience may still be a net gain in social value. This finding is expanded in the appreciation narrative.

An authentically produced object maintains a sense of authorship even when removed from the creator. Since we determine that labor is personal, we can extrapolate some of the consequences of how we dispose of the objects we create. If we sell an object to a stranger, we lose some social value of the object. One way to mitigate this social loss is to brand an object with an essence, such as an ethnic or other designator. I might pay more for an Amish candle than a candle of unknown origin. I might even buy a candle I did not need if I knew that a young mother had produced it. That is, if a maker sells an object with no additional information about how it was made or who the maker is, it has only object value. However, if a maker sells an object and includes information about the maker and the processes and materials involved in making the product, it retains some of the essence of its origins for the purchaser. It has a potentially increased level of value. Labor seems to have social value only when we connect it to other people. His finding suggests that makers might be able to increase the price of their wares were they willing to celebrate and advertise the essence of the objects they create. This finding may have implications for foreign labor exploitation practices as well. For example, if each object on the shelves of department stores had photographs of the conditions under which it were created, the experience for the purchaser would be very different and final value of the object would be altered. Value is not entirely based on supply and demand or purely economically driven. For example, a Halloween decoration produced in a Chinese labor camp may be my cheapest option; however, if I am aware of the production circumstances of the goods, I am willing to pay much more for an item made by socially responsible production practices.

Finally, another paradoxical element of essence embedded within made objects is related to error and idiosyncrasy. When selling handmade items, errors and idiosyncrasies detract value in market norms based on global production practices in which flawlessness is the consumer standard. Consumer culture uses “a variety of practices of communication in which smooth, shiny, seamless textures are employed in the construction of meanings of flawlessness [...] the presence of glossiness in commercial industry indicates a realm of fantasized perfection” (Iqani, 2012, p. 96). My interview participants only wanted to sell products that were perfect or machine quality. The errors and idiosyncrasies which discourage the makers I interviewed from selling products, add value when sold in venues which maintain social values upon the conversion to market value (e.g., art venues, ethnic craft festivals). Finally, errors and idiosyncrasies add value when given as gifts as they are indicators of the true essence of the object; as Lorraine said, “it has your flaws, it’s kind of like you.”

The idea of essence emerges in Knill et al.’s (2005) analysis of poiesis as the fundamental principle upon which expressive arts therapy is founded. The poietic work of expressive arts therapy “contains a mystery that keeps it from being an object of knowledge; it will always be more than we can say about it in our interpretations” (p. 39). Knill et al. (2005) maintains that the work is “not the atemporal existence aimed at in the tradition of philosophy; rather the work is always situated in a particular historical world” (p. 39). In this sense, poietic labor practices in which we know by making may refer not only to what the making of the object has to teach us but also may be related to the origins of the object, the knowledge contained within the object. This reimagining of poiesis uses Hegel’s (1998) notion of essence in which essence and being are inherently related to the object’s becoming



and reside within the living essence of the matter, which “would be not so much its truth but rather our knowledge of it” (p. 53). These objects seem to have a temporal permanence.

There are historical precedents for the idea that objects are imbued with the spirit of the creator. Navajo weavings provide a good example of traditional objects imbued with spirit.

“If you look closely at the upper right hand corner of a Navajo textile, you may notice a small but visible strand of contrasting colored yarn. This line, intentionally placed by the weaver, usually extends from the inner design field to the outer border. In English, this line is often called the spiritline, the Navajo weaver’s pathway, or the spirit pathway[...]. The term for the pathway [or spiritline] in the Navajo language is alternatively *ch’ihónít’i* or *’atiin*, which translate as a ‘way out’, or ‘road’ respectively. This break in the design pathway is meant to allow weavers to separate themselves from the woven product created to sell.” (Ahlberg, 2012)

It’s interesting that Navajo weavers purposely remove their essence from an object before passing it on to a marketplace as opposed to having it stripped as a consequence. It’s common in Navajo culture for spiritual connections to occur between people and objects, such as handmade products, ceremonial materials or personal items (Ahlberg, 2012).

Further, the spiritual connection “can be enhanced, as in the case of textiles created for personal use, where weavers can intentionally put objects and immaterial items—thoughts, prized personal qualities, prayers, blessings—into the weaving that can imbue it with power” (Ahlberg, 2012). I found that my participants spoke of items in a way that is consistent with this Navajo belief; however, there was no ceremonial detaching or releasing of spirit when items were sold or gifted, other than the traditional Western gifting and selling practices. I

wonder if we might lessen the sense of loss of essence if we gifted and sold items in a ritual way which acknowledged the passing along of essence, or symbolically released essence of the times we lost.

Finally, one tenet of the maker revolution is that everyone is a maker (Hatch, 2013). As I ponder the value that essence has for makers, I wonder about the educational environments my children experience. The obsession with standardization in public schools creates a similar seeping of essence as we sterilize information and student experiences in an effort to create a ubiquitous sameness. In search of equality and standards, we reduce classrooms, students, and educational environments to sterile academic fields often unrelated to personal experiences, individual bodies, or communities. As we strip our education and students of essence, I fear we lower their quality of life and possibly the quality of their education as well.

***Appreciation.*** Makers have a desire to show skill and be valued for it. They often seek exhibitionism of their work through gifting, blogging, maker groups, and artistic exhibitions. Appreciation and acknowledgement of skill are important to makers and public venues for these products might be psychologically advantageous. That is, we probably gain psychological capital via public exhibition of our work or at the very least via public acknowledgement and appreciation. This aspect of making moves the practice beyond personal gratification into a social value. Further, exhibition may be more rewarding in circumstances in which items cannot be sold. Removing the economic aspect of showing work strips the potential of loss of social value which may be anxiety inducing and diminish the overall return of psychological capital. Selling things often interrupts well-being in that it sacrifices some psychological capital by subverting social value in transition to market norm.

Alternatively, admiring making skills in a completely exhibitionary setting devoid of economic consequence would likely be deeply rewarding for makers. Additionally, makers would likely submit their best work to an exhibition of this nature; whereas, I found makers were likely to submit lower commitment works to exhibitions involving economic repercussions.

I found that appreciation is of major importance among makers. Makers seek multiple venues in search of appreciation and social acknowledgement of skills. Makers describe appreciation as a recognition of the time and skill involved in the creation of the product, open show of gratitude when gifted an object, public admiration of an object, repeated praise over time, continual use, and occasional mention after the fact. Appreciation is present among those who recognize that objects may be imbued with spiritual qualities (time, energy, effort, love). Further I found that the appreciation of the recipient of a gifted handmade item is less important if in a group setting wherein other members are capable of appreciating the item. That is, the gifting of a handmade item is a social event not solely comprised of the gifter and recipient.

Finally, I found that makers become knowledgeable about making by having expertise in one area. For example, a person who carves figurines is capable of appreciating intricate crocheting despite never having crocheted. That is, makers who work with their hands in any discipline, enables them to better appreciate the labor involved in other disciplines. Being a maker enables the appreciation of other makers.

**Addiction.** My participants repeatedly engaged addiction narratives when discussing their craft practices. Each participant, at some point during the interview, used terms traditionally related to addiction. Molly discussed her knitting directly in terms of addiction,

“I mean I pretty much hide my stash. I’m an addict. I’m a closet hoarder.” She went on to use the same narrative in an analysis of her work as a thespian, “I mean it’s an addiction too in a way that knitting and all this other stuff is. Because – this sounds terrible, but if I didn’t have a family, I would do it year round. I would be in every play that I possibly could be in.” Participants often refer to crafting supplies as their “stash.” Participants sometimes refer to “binge” crafting and they continually speak of the difficulty of resisting the urge to craft or learning to control the impulse to sit down and knit for an hour. Stavinga described working on a project with a deadline as “binge sewing.” They speak in terms of extreme need and suggest daily intake as important. Molly discussed the importance of her daily practice, “like a lot of times, I can’t go to sleep at night unless I have sat in my chair and knitted for a few minutes.”

My participants acknowledged not always being able to fit making into their days; however, they believed that their making practices enabled them to take on more daunting tasks. As Molly described, “knitting gets me through the other stuff [...] knitting makes me able to pay the bills.” Participants repeatedly made reference to a feeling of being deprived if they did not get a little crafting in every day. Finally, participants openly talked about their craft practice as a form of self-medication. They recognize crafting as something that they need to do in order to be good people, mothers, wives, or parishioners. Further, most of my participants bluntly stated that they needed to craft in order to be happy. The addiction narrative is an indication that making practices are important for the well-being of my participants. It is reminiscent of Dissanayake’s (1992) work around the function of art/craft practices in which she notes that every society of human beings in recorded history practices at least one form of art - craft practice “and for many groups engaging with the arts ranks

among the society's most important endeavors" (Dissanayake, 1992, p. xiii). The ubiquity of art/craft behaviors in human culture is an indication that "an important appetite or need is being expressed" (Dissanayake, 1992, p. xiii). I assert that the addiction narrative is also an indication that an important need is being expressed among my participants.

One interesting aspect of the addiction narrative is related to Lambert's (2008) neuroscientific findings in which the reward systems in the brains of depressed patients had a "hypersensitive response to stimulants" (p. 61). This finding led scientists to determine that the brain's reward system may be more involved in the symptoms of depression than traditional theories of depression indicate (Lambert, 2008). Lambert (2008) postulated that the hypersensitivity to response was a result of the brain's reward system not getting sufficient action during the daily experiences of the depressed patient and that,

In an attempt to compensate for the lack of pleasurable responses, the nerve cells in this area became super sensitive, perhaps sprouting new receptors or more sensitive receptors, in order to maximize the response to any circulating reward chemicals that might pass the nucleus accumbens's way. In other words, the system's response to a sudden flood of amphetamine would be pronounced, a real brain reward party. (pp. 61- 62)

Lambert (2008) postulates that the hypersensitivity may be related to the behavioral activation therapy (Martell & Dimidjian, 2010) findings of depression mitigation, but I wonder if it might also be related to the addiction narratives I found among makers. Could a hypersensitivity to a reward result in addictive tendencies among those who partake or is the addiction narrative simply a cultural co-opting to express engaging in a rewarding behavior?

Is the addiction narrative appealing to makers because they experience the same reward, pull and cravings that addicts experience? Is it possible that making practices are, in fact, a mode of self-medicating in an environment that does not feed the makers fundamental needs to flourish as individuals? Seligman's (2011) theory of well-being lays out five areas in need of development in order to flourish including, positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement. Making practices help to shore up many of these domains of independent life. For example, Stavinga's making practice provides her with tremendous engagement as she works deeply and steadily in her practice almost every day. It feeds positive social relationships in that she actively attends two different craft groups. It provides her with a sense of achievement as she displays her work both on her blog and at craft meetings. It provides her with positive emotion as she receives many accolades for her work and is filled with a sense of gratification and accomplishment. Finally, it provides her with *meaningful* work. I am reminded of the cancer prayer quilt in which Stavinga created a message of hope and love for a fellow parishioner battling cancer. The quilt provided Stavinga the opportunity to belong to and serve something bigger than herself, the hallmark of meaningful work in Seligman's (2011) theory. It is important to point out that, while making practices may be profoundly rewarding from a neurobiological perspective, reward alone is not sufficient to characterize a behavior as addictive (Engs, 1987). I believe the makers in my study used an addiction narrative as a means of describing the level of reward they experienced when engaging their practices, as opposed to actually being behavioral making addicts. This narrative is a powerful indicator that making practices contribute to well-being.

*Artist.* I found the artist narrative interacting with each of my participants; however, none of my participants were willing to claim the label artist. In fact, they openly and fervently rejected the notion. The artist narrative, in some ways, acts negatively upon my subjects; however, I recognize that among other subject pools, it may be profoundly rewarding. My participants identified art as being about placing themselves within a larger cultural context. They universally avoided calling themselves artists and several went so far as to suggest it would be impossible to ever call themselves artists and that it would feel fraudulent to do so. When asked what would enable her to call herself an artist, Lorraine responded, “I’d never be able to say that, I’d feel like I was cheating.” This extended to specific types of art making. Stavinga described her work with photography, “I’m someone who takes pictures, but I’m not a photographer” or Mara described her work with painting, “I paint, but I’m not a painter.” When confronted with the circular logic, participants recognized that it didn’t make semantic sense and justified their beliefs via the cultural art narrative in which they ascribed to artists a set of characteristics. I asked each participant, “what is an artist?” and then compiled the responses into a collective definition. Artists are a select few who have mastered skills and perfected technique usually within a single domain, are readily recognized and appreciated as artists by the larger community and regularly receive economic compensation for their creations. By this cultural definition, my participants have a very low chance of ever achieving the artist status, if for no other reason than that there are only a select few artists. Interestingly, my participants were quick to apply the label of artist to others in their social group, largely bestowed in compliment form, perhaps as a means of expressing appreciation and acknowledging a fellow maker’s skills.

Residing as an artist within the artist narrative was largely inaccessible for my participants. When I posed circumstances which met with the criteria outlined above and asked if they would consider themselves artists under those circumstances, they still said no. The artist narrative is psychologically inaccessible even when you meet the cultural requirements. By and large, it was not a helpful narrative for the makers I interviewed. Subtle shifts in the narrative that might be employed to make the artist narrative more accessible. For example, rather than consider works of art extraordinary, we might find ways to consider works of art ordinary, thereby creating a larger social opportunity among artists? As discussed in the literature review, the 18th century cultural shift in which artist and artisan split and artist became associated with a unique spiritual calling elevated the arena of art making to a select few (Shiner, 2001). We moved from an environment in which art makes special, into an environment where special makes art. I find Seligman's (2011) discussion of the distinction between a job, a career and a calling helpful in this analysis:

You do a job for the money, and when the money stops, you stop working. You pursue a career for the promotions, and when the promotions stop, topped out, you quit or become a time-serving husk. A calling, in contrast, is done for its own sake. You would do it anyway, with no pay and no promotions. "Try to stop me!" is what your heart cries when you are thwarted. (p. 75)

This description of a calling, suggests that everyone can be called. For me, this narrative is not complicated by the idea of being called to an art or craft. Rather, the idea of the "unique spiritual calling" is what troubles the narrative and moves the cultural narrative of art into increasing inaccessibility (Shiner, 2001, p. 9). As the lines between high art and low art blur and as digital delivery of media extends to nearly everyone, perhaps we create a culture in



which art is becoming increasingly accessible again, though I did not find this in my interviews.

The skill-artist cognitive dissonance in which participants claim, “I make art but I’m not an artist,” may be a spandrel of art’s great historical significance in Western culture. It also emerges from the strange interconnection between the art narrative and the economic metanarrative, evidenced by the cultural construction of the art definition exhibited by my participants in which they believed receiving economic compensation for labors is an important factor to be culturally labeled an artist.

Another interesting aspect of the artist narrative is that works of art usually maintain social value. In fact, great works of art are often made almost entirely of social value when they convert to market value. Consider prominent, high economic value works of art such as Marcel Duchamp’s priceless “Fountain” which contains almost no production labor, replicas of which now sell for more than \$2 million (Thornton, 2010), or Andreas Gursky’s “Rhein II” in which a photograph sold for \$4.5 million (Waters, 2011). These objects have wildly inflated value because they contain an essence, a social value.

My participants willingly accepted the notion that they are naturally talented with their hands. They have been told over time that they are “good with their hands,” that they are naturally creative, and that they have innate qualities that render them more capable of success with respect to making. Molly described her relationship with her hands, “I guess there are a lot of things that I do with my hands that I’m just naturally good at. And I guess that’s hereditary.” When I asked if she had always felt this level of confidence in her hands she replied:

I think so. I think I have. I mean they've always – I've always pretty much been able to do things that other people haven't been able to do. Like, you know, I can French braid my own hair, and people would be like, "What? How did you do that?" You know? Stuff like that. And I don't think of it as being anything unusual because it just comes naturally to me.

My participants continually expressed the desire to be using their hands. Mara spoke about knitting as a means of "keeping [her] hands busy." Molly said "I just love working with my hands and doing, making things." Estanislada told me how good it felt to be doing something with her hands again when she took up jewelry making after her car accident. My participants clearly valued the ability to use their hands to manipulate their environments. Mara expressed how much she appreciated her hands doing what she wanted them to do, "not always a given" with the rest of her body because of a chronic joint disease.

While participants valued using their hands, they also recognized that economically, hand-time is generally less lucrative than brain time. When discussing trying to get money for her crafts, Maeve said, "sometimes you really want to get your time, but like I said, using my mind for tutoring is worth one value and using my hands for sewing or doing something else" is worth less. Maeve's argument was that she could never get as much time (by which she meant money) out of using her hands as she could get out of using her mind. Maeve is describing a knowledge economy which is made up of both knowledge workers (those who work with their minds) and manual workers (those who work with their hands); however, in a knowledge economy, the knowledge workers are economically favored (Drucker, 1967). In the interview, Maeve justified using her hands for production as long as she derived enjoyment from the practice, "it's okay to make something because if I'm making something,

hopefully [I'm] enjoying what [I'm] doing.” The implication is that Maeve’s best course of action is to use her brain for economic production and her body/hands for well-being and enjoyment. She could see the logic in the argument and expressed how unfortunate it was, yet she was by far the most engaged and adamant about trying to recover the economic value of her hand labor.

A discussion of the economics of handicrafts is fruitfully complicated by Rose’s (2008) work on the hand-brain divide in educational and cultural settings in which he expressed concern about the way we “celebrate the play of mind in [some] work but diminish and even erase it in other kinds of work, physical and service work particularly” (p. 632). Rose (2008) argues that removing intellectual pursuits from vocational educational tracts which result in physical labor oriented occupations diminishes “whole traditions of human activity” (p. 632). While I agree that it is unfortunate to reduce physical labor to a non-cognitive anti-intellectual pursuit and even grieve the great philosophical dumbing down of wood workers, blacksmiths, quilters, and other artist-crafters, I also mourn the absence of the hands in the intellectual pursuits of academic tracts. Rose (2008) focuses his argument on rescuing the vocational from the intellectual doldrums; however, it is also important to refocus the argument and recognize that intellectual pursuits which discard handiwork also create undesirable outcomes.

Handicrafts have been studied for their contribution to learning and education, especially in relationship to scientific advancements. In a study of 40 young scientists, Root-Bernstein (1995) found a link between the cultivation of a hobby and fruitful scientific work.

Significant correlations were found between scientific success and (1) particular modes of thinking (especially visual ones), (2) artistic and musical hobbies, (3)

having a broad range of avocations and forms of physical exercise, and (4) the efficient use of time to manage many competing vocational and avocational demands. There were also correlations between particular hobbies and use of particular modes of scientific thinking. (p. 115)

This important study, which included both Richard Feynman and Linus Pauling, illustrates that art-craft practices contribute positively to scientific success (Root-Bernstein, 1995). In an effort to produce economically advantageous environments in which institutions produce successful scientific work, misguided policies often reduce the practices that lead to those successes, such as engaging handicrafts, hobbies, or avocations (Root-Bernstein, 1995). Unfortunately, the less successful members of the scientists studied almost all mistakenly believed that spending more time in the lab would produce higher quality work, they had the fewest avocations and believed that extra-curriculars took valuable time away from the real work and would lead to failure (Root-Bernstein, 1995). This erroneous belief about the source of failure resulted in failure for these scientists (Root-Bernstein, 1995). Our educational institutions often fail to take into consideration the important effects that art - craft behaviors (hobbies) have not only on our development with respect to civilization, but also our subjective well-being as a community or culture. In fact, the great labor of Maeve's master's thesis in biochemistry may have been, to some extent, related to her avocation with knitting.

If the above were not reason enough to include handicraft and avocation (making practices) in the curriculum of future scientists, Lambert's (2008) work with depression and effort driven rewards clearly points to depression as interrelated with reduced handiwork in a knowledge economy. A culture which values brain time more than hand time results in a

decline in hand practices. According to Lambert's (2008) effort driven rewards theory, a decline in hand time leads to a decline in psychological capital via gratification. After which, we experience a decline in subjective well-being and resilience against depression, anxiety, and other mental disorders. According to Lambert (2008), "the decreased brains activation associated with increasingly effortless-driven rewards [like those found in behaviors associated with consumer culture] may, over time, [...] increase vulnerability to mental illnesses such as depression" (p. 38).

One final element of the artist narrative which emerged during my interviews was the idea of an aesthetic of care. As Molly described her homemaker aesthetic she said,

I don't know. Maybe that's just – I think we all – men and women all appreciate beauty, and – I don't know, maybe this is – this is going to sound sexist in a way, but I think God made women more beautiful than men. I mean he did. The woman's form is more beautiful than male form. And I think that was one of the things – not that men don't appreciate flowers and – but women just, we like to decorate. We like to make things look pretty. Not all women. That's a generalization. But we like to arrange flowers or grow flowers or make a nice meal that looks pretty, not just tastes good.

We explored her notion further and began to postulate that making things look nice may be an extension of caring for or nurturing others that creating a warm safe place to sleep is only one step away from creating a comfortable space and then one more step away from creating an aesthetically pleasing space. This idea is similar to Dissanayake's (2009) artification theory which postulates that all art and craft practice are the result of applying the processes of formalization, exaggeration, elaboration, repetition, and manipulation of expectation.

Dissanayake's (2009) theory suggests that people artify in an effort to make events, artifacts and actions about which they care more salient. They attempt to lift the ordinary to the extraordinary and *make special* with artification (Dissanayake, 1988). Dissanayake (2009) further suggests that a proto-aesthetic artification emerged as a form of mother-infant bonding which later became a vital evolved component of human nature. The idea of art as an extension of an aesthetic of care resonates with Dissanayake's (2009) theory and creates a shifting reference frame for the engagement of craft practice. As I begin to think about my own making practice and the making practices of the people I know through this lens of the aesthetic of care, I feel an increased tenderness and a powerful social bonding. My mother recently knitted a blanket. She gave it to me and told me that I was on her mind while she made it. She imagined the blanket being a comfort to me, the color beautifying my home and improving the quality of my life. Her practice through the lens of the aesthetic of care is powerfully different than the other narratives I might use to think about this gift.

**Economic narratives.** This section includes a discussion of the economic metanarrative with respect to the narratives which emerged in my interviews. Specifically, I encountered an economic narrative, a maker time narrative, a gifting narrative, and a just-in-case narrative. I entered this research with the assumption that a well-being maker narrative was fundamentally better for mental health than the economic maker narrative; however, I recognize that living within a metanarrative is unavoidable and that awareness is a path to finding ways to be healthy in the narratives within which we reside. I am grateful to this research for helping me find ways to make some peace with the economic metanarrative.

***Homo economicus.*** My participants, perhaps in an effort to justify their practice and the resource it requires, often entertain the idea of selling the things they make. All of my

online participants had spent time attempting to sell items that they had made. Of the six interview participants, four had actively attempted to sell things they had made either online or in retail venues, but all of them had considered it. It is worth noting that my research participants are highly skilled makers who create viable, functional, and without question aesthetically pleasing products.

Throughout the course of my research project, Maeve was actively involved in creating and selling a line of vintage knitting bags. Maeve described how she felt about selling the bags,

It's weird because it's still weird to think that people like something I made and want to buy it. It's hard to believe I've done something that someone else appreciates and wants and is willing to pay money, you know? They value it with money.

This exchange was near the beginning of our conversations about my research. Though Maeve recognized that it would be nice to add extra income, she also acknowledged that wanting to sell things is about more than money:

I really think – I think I may have a niche. Into something that I feel that I might actually – I've always wanted to have something that I could make or do and sell. To validate my existence. Yeah. I need to be more than a toilet cleaner.

Clearly, Maeve has a lot to gain by selling these vintage knitting bags. She is deeply invested and it strikes me as very brave. She has bet a lot on herself in this project, purchased equipment, repurposed a portion of her housing, built a website, sourced materials, and explored options for distribution. Maeve spoke about enjoying the problem solving in the development of the project. She was clearly excited and engaged, yet when I asked her what she would do if it took off, she said “I'm scared to death.” When we reflected on the

time and labor, she said, “I don’t even know if I want to make one of these a week.” By the time of this writing, Maeve has only sold a handful of bags and expressed being “a little disappointed, but then mov[ing] on to something else.” She put a tremendous amount of effort in that project and has moved on to something new. She is ultimately left disappointed.

In an economic metanarrative, we teach our children that the economic decisions they make are of paramount importance. We know that economic ruin can be devastating. The salience of this knowledge runs deeper in unequal economic cultures, as we have further to fall (Wilkinson, 2010). Economic theorists point out the many negative aspects of living in a society with a large income gap (Kawachi, Kennedy, Lochner, & Prothrow-Stith, 1997; McLaren, 2007; Wilkinson, 2010). I wonder if larger economic disparities or larger income gaps create an undercurrent of fear which drives members of a culture to become ever increasing income producers. This finding would be consistent with Wilkinson’s (2010) assessment that “greater inequality seems to heighten people’s social evaluation anxieties by increasing the importance of social status” (p. 43). Unequal societies, in which “some people seem to count for almost everything and others for practically nothing,” would “likely be accompanied by increased status competition and increased status anxiety” (Wilkinson, 2010, p. 44). The rash of mommy bloggers branding themselves for Google ads and creating products based on their domesticity are a good example of a culture that seeks to commodify even our very core attributes (Mendelsohn, 2010). It is dangerous to be unproductive in a world where economic ruin is so devastating, which, of course, is not conducive to relaxation or “down time.” Perhaps, we feel guilty when we are not producing because we always feel behind. All of my participants reported using the practice of knitting to relax. They felt that



knitting helped subside the guilt of not producing and enabled them to relax “while still being productive.”

One aspect of selling items is related to the global manufacturing environment in which the aim is often to produce objects with no error, a manufacturing culture of flawlessness. Factory produced items create a standard in which error is not tolerated. Error free products are inconsistent with a maker philosophy in which error is an inherent part of learning and producing. Handmade objects that are devoid of error are often complimented via in vivo cultural phrases such as “that looks machine quality” or “that could be factory made.” Maeve illustrates this when discussing a sweater she had made; the sweater is “so nice [that] they think it’s store bought? Like nobody thought I made it because it’s not a screw up.” From this perspective, Maeve strives to create flawless objects which are indistinguishable from mass produced objects. An unfortunate consequence of the culture of flawlessness is that items devoid of idiosyncrasy are also devoid of spiritual qualities or essence. Each item is produced identically and to be identical. Mass produced items have no personalized history.



*Figure 8.* Rubber duck.



*Figure 9. Handmade baskets.*

The blue duck is a mass produced item representative of the junk economy (Figure 8; Davidson, 2012). This item has no maker and is not made with a specific owner in mind. It was produced by a series of makers. It likely had a designer, a production manager and a series of manual laborers who brought it into existence. It was created en masse with no specific owner in mind. Instead it was created with the vision of a demographic of owners who would only choose to purchase this item after it came into existence. There was likely little demand for this item until after it came into being. This item has little personal history attached to it. It has a tag or stamp which indicates its country of origin, but the making of this item, is left largely to imagination.

Conversely, the two baskets pictured above were made by my grandmother (Figure 9). She hand dyed the weavers with homemade walnut husk dye. The handles are made from the grape vines which grow behind her house. She designed the baskets herself and made them to fit by the fireplace at my Dad's house. The fireplace is large, and she felt it needed accenting, an act of artification (Dissanayake, 2009). These objects were made by someone and for someone. They came into being purposefully and the story of how they came to be is embedded within the objects. They are poietic in the reimagined sense of

Hegel's (1998) phenomenological knowing. The baskets are infused with meaning, essence, poiesis, origins and purposes. The blue rubber duck is purposely stripped of as much essence as possible, it is poietic knowledge scrubbed away. The blue rubber duck exists in space, but not in time. It has virtually no history and no prescribed future.

Pre-industrial revolution objects were not devoid of spiritual essence, and in fact, the Arts and Crafts movement revolt was to some extent a reaction to this loss (Adamson, 2010). Morris (2010) laments the advent of mechanistic labor as a loss of "pure handicraft [...] the workman became a mere part of a machine composed sometimes wholly of human beings and sometimes of human beings plus labour-saving machines" (p. 150). The advent of machine quality means the absence of human quality. Current consumer standards create an aesthetic in which imperfection is often undesirable and objectionable. The aesthetic of flawlessness distorts our values as our culture shifts toward factory preferences and standards. This cultural construction stands in stark contrast to ancient Eastern philosophical aesthetics such as wabi-sabi in which imperfection is celebrated and impermanence considered an immutable value (Koren, 2008).

Within maker culture, there is an emerging appreciation of idiosyncrasy among products, reminiscent of Morris's (2010) hope for "a contradictory [to mass production] in the shape of a new and improved period of production by handicraft" (p. 150). The widespread rejection of corporate culture and consumerism creates a pocket of *craftivists* who encourage supporting local makers instead of engaging an exploitative global production practice (Tapper, 2011). As a result, there is an economic market in which handmade items flourish. In this economic subculture, the error and idiosyncrasy which

identify an object as not factory produced have an increased social value. In these venues, there may be rewarding economic paths for makers.

While I am aware of maker culture economic pockets, my interview participants had not had positive experiences with those venues, with the exception of Estanislada. She began selling jewelry at a flea market booth that her mother rented when she was still confined to her wheelchair. She was successful selling items in that setting and reported that it felt “great, like self-worth. Somebody is loving something that I made and it’s nice to make money, too. It’s very validating.” She had a positive experience; however, at the time, she had few alternative avenues for producing income. That is, she was not compelled to compare it to a job as a biochemist as Maeve would have, for example. Also, some of her costs were extricated to her mother. For example, she did not pay for the booth fees. When pricing, she simply marked up her materials with the final goal of buying more materials and producing more jewelry. She did not burden her making practice with her living expenses. The jewelry making experience was a tremendous boon for Estanislada at the time, credited for helping her overcome her depression. In the long term though, her experience using jewelry to produce income is the reason she no longer engages this practice so beneficial to her well-being. It is possible that even positive economic making experiences cost us something. With a slight narrative shift, Estanislada could have had a lifetime of making jewelry in which the practice was justified simply via well-being.

All of the online questionnaire participants had some experience selling goods on Etsy. When I asked them how they felt about the experience of having sold the things they had made, the response was positive. My limited sense from the interview responses and from looking at the total number of sales over time on each seller’s Etsy shop was that the

respondents had turned to Etsy as a source of extra income and as a way to share their practices with the world. It is also worth noting that some of the participants opted not to answer this question. It could be that those who had negative experiences with selling preferred not to recount them. That said, the language surrounding the feelings from selling items was unmistakably positive. Following is a list of phrases and words the survey respondents used to describe selling the things they make: “feels fantastic,” “confidence booster,” “very rewarding,” “validation,” “appreciation and joy,” “great satisfaction,” “awesome,” “wonderful experience.” I turned to my interview participants for a more nuanced analysis of this phenomenon in the remainder of the economic analysis and found that the positive experience may not necessarily be a healthy experience with respect to well-being. One respondent noted, “there’s nothing better than having someone actually pay money for something you created.” This statement was reminiscent of Maeve’s comment about the reward we feel when someone values our labor with money. In this case, money is a powerful form of appreciation. In an economically driven culture, money is a primary need, responsible for providing us with food, water, and shelter (Maslow, 1943). It stands to reason that feeling very good when someone wants something you made might also open makers to feeling very bad when someone does not value something you have made.

My interview participants were totally invested in the economic metanarrative. They felt, as Estanislada did, that they would “feel better about making things if people bought them” and continued, even after years of trying and failing, to find venues and products to sell. However, when examining the circumstances under which they had sold things, they universally felt uneasy about the sales. Even in a circumstance where the economics of the sale was advantageous, Estanislada admitted to often recreating the exact same object to

keep. The data support the idea that selling things we make often does not feel very good. Being a maker toward economic ends in addition to well-being ends may be further complicated from a motivational perspective. Deci (1971) addressed this issue with a group of students playing with puzzles. Some of the students were paid a small sum and other students were not. Once the experiment appeared to end, Deci (1971) monitored how long each group continued to play before moving on to another task, such as reading a magazine. The students who had been paid stopped playing with the puzzles more quickly and Deci (1971) concluded that having been paid decreased motivation for the activity they had once found fun. This principle is echoed in Ariely's (2008) work in which two reasons to do something is, counter intuitively, not always more motivating than one reason. Sometimes the motivations work against each other. Essentially, selling an object, may reduce the amount of well-being that a maker feels upon producing future similar objects, and may interrupt the benefits of a making practice.

Participants found it easier to gift objects than to sell them. Lorraine said she “felt wrong selling things, felt guilty, and was concerned about the quality.” She would much rather gift or trade an item. Trading an item was easier because she felt both items would contain error and the transaction was more equal than if money were involved. One negative aspect of selling may be the complicated economics of pricing objects we have made. It turns out that pricing handmade objects is a high cognitive dissonance activity in which participants, like Molly, felt that the prices they put on handmade objects felt both “too high and too low at the same time.” Putting an affordable price tag on an object is necessary, and my participants were largely pricing for the global market via online venues. Molly felt that putting a price tag on an item devalued it; “Oh well, that’s what it’s worth. Suddenly it

doesn't have a – like all the love drained out, you know?" This cognitive dissonance may be a result of creating prices the market will bear and losing social value as a result. I wonder if some element of social value is lost upon conversion to market norm regardless of price or if creating a viable high price (as we see with expensive works of art) might mitigate the loss of social norms. Clark and Mills (1979) discussion of social norm to market norm conversion does not allow for high prices to re-introduce social norms; however, later research suggests that relationships are more fluid (Batson, 1993). Finding ways to maintain communal values within an exchange based relationship might help lessen the negative aspects of being a maker and engaging economic pursuits for the objects we create.

During the time of the interviews, Stavinga was living in the United States but was not on a work visa and as a result was legally prohibited from earning income. Stavinga easily subverted the economic metanarrative. When I asked her about selling the items she makes, she smiled and said easily, "I can't make money here. I'm not on a work visa, so I can't sell things." The other participants struggled with the question both physically and verbally and showed exasperation with audible groans or by throwing their hands up in the air. This participant easily moved past it. I later asked about bartering and questioned her about how she might feel if she were to consider selling the items she made. She went on to discuss a pending application for a work visa and struggled with the idea in similar ways to the other participants. When faced with the idea that she could make money with her products, she assumed that she would attempt it; however, she exhibited none of the anxiety over the question that I witnessed in the other participants. I honestly felt jealous of her ability to so easily discard the notion that she might commoditize her practice.

The economics of making in Western culture is complicated by overseas production practices in which labor is grossly undervalued and material costs are very low (Leonard & Conrad, 2010). It creates a consumer environment in which production costs are extricated and consumer end prices are often too low for Western-based makers to create much income relative to knowledge economy labor practices. Economic inequality in manufacturing produces an environment which undervalues labor everywhere, not just in countries with low wages. Oftentimes, in the US, we can buy something cheaper than we can make it which hinders our ability to make things and sell them locally. One avenue around this practice is to create objects that retain a social or spiritual essence as occurs within the maker economic subculture. Makers might also create objects and celebrate their social values within the economic metanarrative through other means. For example, a maker might celebrate the ethnic or cultural essence or spiritual quality of a product to attract buyers. Native American dream catchers, for example, may have more value if the buyer knows they were made by Native Americans as opposed to having been produced overseas (perhaps in Asia) and stamped with a Made in China sticker.

The origins of an object are important because the history imbues the object with an essence which contains a social value (Newman, 2011). In an effort to understand the nature of object temporal social value, by exploring the relationship between object value and celebrity contact, Newman (2011) conducted this study examining,

Three potential explanations: mere associations, market demands, and contagion (the belief that these objects contain some remnants of their previous owners). Results indicate that while market demands do play a role, contagion appears to be the critical factor affecting the valuation of celebrity possessions. Manipulating the degree of



physical contact that a celebrity has with an object dramatically influences consumers' willingness to purchase it, and individual differences in sensitivity to contagion moderate this effect. Additionally, the valuation of celebrity possessions is principally explained by measures of contagion, and subliminally activating the concept of contagion changes consumers' willingness to purchase celebrity objects. (Newman, 2011, p. 215)

The same principle may be acting on handmade products in maker economic subcultures. Another tactic for attracting buyers within an economic metanarrative might be to imbue an object with a philanthropic essence by donating portions of the proceeds.

***Maker time.*** All of my interview participants were in long-term relationships with partners who brought income to the household at the time of my interviews. I asked each of my participants about the relationship between their making practices and their domestic partnerships. I suspected that the economic heads of household would apply pressure to makers to produce income from their practices. I assumed that my participants' partners would see the makers utilizing shared family resources and suggest that they try to recover the loss of resource by becoming economic producers via their crafts. I did not find any evidence of this. In fact, each of my participants reported unconditional support from spouses. They repeatedly said that their spouses not only did not pressure them, but also considered their craft practice important for their well-being. Their spouses considered their practice important as a social outlet, providing a sense of purpose and occupying time. According to my findings, the pressure to produce economically via craft practice is a result of an economic cultural narrative acting on the maker. It would be interesting to explore the

economic aspect of makers who are totally financially independent and determine whether or not the economic cultural narrative acts differently upon those makers.

Participants felt tremendous pressure to produce income, but it was largely independently derived. That is, makers put pressure on themselves to be income producers, probably as a result of living within an economic metanarrative in which value is consumer and economically derived. When there was direct pressure to produce income, it was often from friends or family members outside the home who were very supportive of the making process and were eager to see the maker produce income from the practice. When asked, why do you want to sell things, Maeve responded, “I guess it’s me wanting to be marketable” which may be an extension of wanting to be valued in a culture where value is economically derived.

The participants of my study mostly considered themselves homemakers which created a binary social construction in which home making was thought of as an alternative to being in the traditional workforce. They repeatedly expressed the idea that they were stealing time and that time spent making things created a time deficit for their home lives. Maeve describes feeling that she needs to “get her time out of a project” by selling or gifting it because her practice depletes family resources:

I did take money from family to buy the cloth . . . I took time away from maybe making sure the baseboards are clean. I took time away from making my family life . . . but at the same time I need to find something that I feel good about, but I’ve always – I have tried for the most part. Any crafting or hobby I’ve done to make money up to guarantee that I wasn’t depleting the family funds.

When questioned further, participants revealed feeling a need to be economically productive. When they chose or were forced out of economic production for one reason or another, they considered themselves working in the home. Often participants seemed to denote all their waking hours as “working at home” hours, which they then had to either steal or reimburse in order to do something for themselves or engage a making practice. Participants reported gifting objects they produced in an effort to reimburse stolen time. This complicated relationship between domestic labor and workforce productivity cannot be easily dismissed. A narrative shift among the nature of domestic labor would likely be fruitful for the subjective well-being of many domestic partners.

This notion of stealing time is all wrapped up in the economic metanarrative. It strikes me as profoundly damaging as it creates a barrier to stress reduction in that we feel we create a time debt as we engage activities we perceive as stress reducing. Further, it prevents us from being able to keep the things we produce which adds gratification to our daily lives and helps us build resilience. It is possible that members of the traditional workforce have an easier time delineating between work hours and “me” hours; however, the “always on” world of digital technology erodes that narrative as well. Further research in this area would be illuminating. A functional narrative shift in which we openly recognize that it is okay to be still would probably contribute to mental health; however, this hyper production narrative is wound tightly with an economic reality that shows little sign of change. Maeve remarked, “I watch TV and I get a lot of knitting done and I feel like I’m accomplishing even though I’m relaxing and it’s not stressful.” In a product driven world in which we are constantly commoditized, knitting is a way to relax. This is especially important for homemakers who are always on the clock. A well-being narrative may be another way to combat this negative

reality of the economic metanarrative. The idea that taking time to knit makes you a better parent or partner is a mitigation strategy I encountered in my interviews. Molly describes how her partner supports her yarn crafting, “he learned early on in our relationship that I need that in order to be a happy, productive mom in life.”

Makers indicated that time spent crafting was the equivalent of “alone time” which was particularly important for young mothers who reported feeling a great deficit of adequate time alone. One of the online participants contributed a story to illustrate her experience with the interaction of her craft practice, well-being and time.

Take any hard day. No take the day when after only being a new mom for about a month. The sleepless night and crying baby. Husband comes home to tell me he has been put on layoff. I'm overwhelmed, tired, unhappy with life. But my quilt frame is sitting in the corner collecting dust since about 6 months pregnant as I can't fit under it to quilt. The quilt is still on it waiting for me. Husband takes our little girl out to give me a break. I sit down on the couch and see it out of the corner of my eye. The hope of another beautiful blanket just waiting for me. I should lay down and sleep I'm so tired. But instead I walk over and run my fingers over the top. The softness of the fabric and the rigidness of the thread of quilting. I sigh and close my eyes. I have to sit. I must pick up the long neglected needle and start to stitch. I prick my finger by accident and tears fall and a soothing peacefulness settles over me like a soothing hug. All will be OK. All will be fine. I sob out my frustrations, my anger, my fears, my soul deep weariness into that quilt. But then as the stitches become lines and lines a pattern and patterns a quilt I feel so much happier. So much calmer. I can smile again. Time passes and soon I see my husband walk in with my daughter. I look up

and smile feeling happier and more content with my world. Even hubby notices and smiles back. I swear even she noticed and cooed at me. No nothing was solved by my working on a quilt. Our problems still remained. But I was happier, calmer and able to see everything better. It was a magic that soothes me every time I sit down and pick up a needle.

For many young mothers, such as the participant above, there is little escape from the permanent onslaught of being a new parent and dealing with the never-ending struggles of family life. Participants reported feeling that time spent crafting was a gift to themselves, even though they rarely kept any of the final products. Similarly, participants reported feeling that they “stole time” in order to make things. This is an indication that participants felt their time might be better spent elsewhere and may explain some of the guilt reported by participants. It may also feed their desire to be more economically productive in their crafting. Participants reported feeling good when their labor had a final product. Typical household labor, such as washing dishes, tends to be a constant maintenance issue; whereas, crafting does often result in a singular final product. Participants expressed that crafting labor was qualitatively different from other household chores in that once it was done, it was done.

***Giftng.*** Makers often use gifting as a justification narrative for engaging making practices. It is common for crafters to assume that the economic balance sheet of making a gift is comparable to the economic balance sheet of purchasing a gift; however, upon doing the math, many participants found that they spent more money on making gifts than they would have spent on purchasing gifts. Additionally, they routinely did not provide an economic value to their time and effort when figuring gifts; however, they did recognize that

gift had an overall increased social value (personal, essence) as a result of their time and effort. Consequently, makers also felt that made gifts had more end value; they considered it a better gift than if it had been purchased and that it had added value beyond the product itself (personal or essence). Before calculating the actual cost of gifting, makers consistently felt that made gifts were economically cheaper. In reality, made gifts were often as expensive as or more expensive than purchased gifts.

Despite being economically disadvantageous, the gifting narrative has many laudable values. For example, gifting subverts the market norm shift of economics while maintaining the monetary value placeholder for a gift without discarding the social value. Additionally, gifting provides an opportunity for skill acquisition in which the resources devoted have a mode of return. For example, a maker might have purchased a gift for \$25. Instead, the maker spends \$35 creating a gift. It may be worth it because, the maker takes the opportunity to learn more about how to make these things, or to offset the cost of tools required to create this and future items. Also, the value of the original gift may be large; however, with experience and the proper tools, that cost is offset with each additional gift the maker creates. Additionally, the recipient may attribute a final product value of greater than \$35 because it includes labor and is infused with spiritual qualities associated with the maker (e.g., love, uniqueness, essence, prayer).

An interesting analytical perspective for gifting among makers is that maker wages are too low to justify the practice; however, that may not be the case with gifting. Heyman (2004) found that contrary to standard economic theory, meager economic compensation tends to reduce effort and engagement as it eliminates the gift effect and disincentivizes the gifter. Gifting may be an activity beneficial for well-being. We may engage gifting not

merely as a means of economic recovery for practices we would engage either way, but also as a way of achieving a sense of well-being. This reminds me of the reward Stavinga reported feeling upon gifting the Cancer prayer quilt. Surely the activity brought Stavinga an increased sense of well-being.

***Skill acquisition.*** The last narrative was a self-sufficiency “just-in-case” psychology of making marked by in vivo phrases such as “so I’ll know how” or “in case I need to.” This self-preservation making narrative manifests as a desire for makers to protect themselves and their families in the “worst case scenarios.” Maeve explains,

I learned canning, how to preserve, dehydration, cooking all sorts of different things because I’ve always worried about the fact that what if we have a collapse or what is that electromagnetic pulsing that will knock out all the [electricity] and all these futuristic kind of stories and it’s like, a lot of people are going to be clueless and I’m not going to be one of them.

I wonder if this psychological disposition is related to having experienced resource deficit as that notion did emerge during the interviews. I suspect this idea is related to economic recession which tends to fuel pop cultural and media representations of post apocalyptic and dystopian futures to address deeper "fears which are often political, economic, and psychological. [They] are so deeply buried and yet so vital that we may tap them like artesian wells-saying one thing out loud while we express something else in a whisper" (King, 2001, pp. 5-6). In other words, post apocalyptic versions of the future may address an audience’s cultural, political, and economic underlying fears. Further research in this area would be interesting.

I also wonder if this skill acquisition narrative may have something to do with assuring a place among the group in a tribal mentality. For example, makers may subconsciously or consciously seek to develop a set of skills that render them valuable to a group. This set of skills might also instill a sense of confidence that the maker can cope with what is coming. It may be related to a psychological defense mechanism in which makers build resiliency against future mental deficit or develop confidence to be active participants in the world. In this sense, the opposite of paralysis is the belief that you can handle what will happen if you move and make choices. Developing maker skills may help mitigate that paralysis.

### **Maker Education**

The stories my participants told about first beginning their making journeys create a legacy of women who credited for introducing them into a maker culture. Their stories exhibited mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and other women who passed down their making skills. I asked my participants about their education as makers and, for the most part, making practices were not adopted in public schools. They were divided between culture commons knowledge, quasi-formal educational settings, and autodidactic learning.

The culture commons appeared mostly in the form of passing down the knowledge to make something from one generation to the next, or sometimes a generation removed. In the case of my participants, the knowledge was passed down through women; however, I expect that had I interviewed men, I would find men in the culture commons as well. In honor of these grandmotherly relationships, many of my research participants chose the name of a great grandmother as their pseudonyms. The culture commons was also present in the form



of mentors, in which participants sought a person to help them with a specific making practice issue they experienced.

The culture commons represents nonmonetized and nonprivatized areas of communal life, such as knowledge passed down freely from one generation to the next (Bowers, 2006). Bowers (2004) discusses the many negative impacts of the collapse of culture commons through the process of enclosure. The process of enclosure involves privatizing and monetizing areas of life that were once freely available to everybody in the community (Ecologist, 1993). Bowers (2004) work attempts to revitalize the commons or the non-monetized aspects of daily life. While Bowers (2004) work focuses on educating for a sustainable future around ecology, I find relevance in his work for makers. Making practices are becoming ever further monetized (largely driven by makers themselves) and privatized through the development of private maker spaces. Society might benefit from the development of publically funded open access maker spaces. Further, adding maker spaces to school settings would help democratize this practice, as virtually all members of the community have access to schooling. Democratization of maker spaces is important not only because making practices are beneficial to well-being (Lambert, 2008), but also because many maker spaces are cradles of innovation (Hatch, 2013).

Revitalizing the commons – that is, the non-monetized aspects of daily life - is not a matter of going back to an earlier period of cultural existence [...] rather, it involves renewing the intergenerational knowledge of mentoring in the arts and building skills, use of locally adapted technologies, growing and preparing food, ceremonies, and so forth. In short, it involves becoming aware of, valuing, and renewing the non-monetized natural and symbolic systems that we depend upon for enhancing the

quality of human health, relationships, activities, and need for aesthetic expression (Bowers, 2004, p. 4).

The quasiformal educational settings makers reported using are also extensions of a culture commons. These learning hubs included community college continuing education courses, classes held in local businesses or offered by local craft organizations, festival educational opportunities, and digital classes and tutorials designed to educate.

The final mode of learning reported by my research participants is autodidactic learning. Self-directed learning is how my participants primarily engaged their practices at the time of my interviews; however, they were introduced to making first by the culture commons, through mentors and by informal educational settings.

**Maker Learning Characteristics.** Of the makers I interviewed, I found many common characteristics. As I coded my data, I began to notice an identifiable set of maker skills acquired by each of my participants through her practice. My interview participants displayed and discussed at length the characteristics outlined below. The learning style employed by makers and evidenced in the skills discussed here may be transferable to other areas of life. That is, a maker-based poietic curriculum may have the benefit of helping to create these learning characteristics.

I found that the makers I interviewed were tenacious in the face of error and had a dogged determination. My participants reported failures among their projects, and while they did occasionally abandon a project, error more often drove makers to deeper research and practice. When faced with a project that failed, makers tended to wonder why and dove deeper into the practice attempting to create a viable product. Maeve describes her tenaciousness,

I am determined on some things that I'm going to figure it out. It's not going to be beyond me. Again, I would figure it out and when I'm done I'm going to do it well if I'm going to do it at all. I'm going to claim it.

Maeve went on to discuss the long list of errors she experienced when trying to perfect a project for a product launch. She was attempting to make vintage knitting bags to sell at the local yarn craft store and on the internet. She described overcoming problems with wood sourcing and sewing thick upholstery material. She spoke with such enthusiasm and her investment, both financially and emotionally, was clear. It was also clear that solving the problems of creating a durable and aesthetically pleasing bag was exciting for her and that she was enjoying being so deeply involved in the project. When I asked if her mistakes hindered her, she responded,

I take them home and I cry or whatever else or I try not to bleed all over it. Like the bags I made previously, the frame and everything is terrible. I was able to break it up. I still don't know if I've got it right. It still has an imperfection in it, but future bags will have a different quality of wood and I think I have the frame so....

I asked all of my participants and the online crafters about their experiences with error. One of the online crafters described her experience as:

I am a self taught "sewist" so when I first began creating tote bags and quilts, I would spend hours studying the patterns or finding different ways to sew them, features to add, etc. I also spent LOTS of time with a seam ripper due to unsuccessful sewing attempts! However, I did not let that discourage me from sewing and now have a small business selling tote bags and quilts. I can look back on that time of learning and appreciate how far I have come in such little time. I am so glad I didn't give up!

Maker determination is probably influenced by a fundamental faith among makers that their labor is fruitful. Makers shared a basic belief that time spent making is not wasted. They believed that all making resulted in a skill acquisition and held a confidence that if you put enough into a project (time, resource, energy), you will eventually get a return on your labor. Makers exhibit the acceptance of a learning curve. They understand and accept that new practices involve a learning curve which is marked by incremental improvement over time. In some circumstances, the improvement may even be invisible, but makers trust that they are incrementally improving, even without visible evidence of improvement. Makers believed that all time spent making resulted in skill acquisition even when you could not recognize the skills you were acquiring. These elements emerge in a discussion of quilting with Molly. She began quilting a Christmas tree skirt and she hated her stitches.

It's the perfectionist in me coming out. I know that it's one of those things I'm just going to have to do and be happy with the results because it's one of those things that's only going to get better as I practice doing it, getting smaller and smaller stitches. I am determined to learn to quilt.

Molly knows that she is improving even when she is producing items that she is not proud of and does not like.

Makers commonly sought out the work of others for inspiration and instruction. While there was occasional guilt associated with the notion of having stolen an idea, makers did not hesitate to move beyond their own experiences when attempting new projects. Molly describes others' reaction to her work,

People say, “Oh, you’re so creative. How did you think to do that?” And a lot of times, I don’t know, that it’s my creativity. It’s that I’m willing to go out and seek other people’s creativity. So I’ll see an idea, and I’ll be like, “Oh, I could do that.” While Molly attributes her creativity to being inspired by the work of others, that inspiration is synthesized through her craft practice and results in novel products. Molly also easily accepted the notion that creativity is a universal human characteristic, “I guess everybody’s creativity comes out in different ways.” An obstructive maker stereotype is the idea that makers are simply more creative than other people. This stereotype is quickly rebuffed by emerging makers; however, the stereotype exists as a barrier in becoming a maker. It is important that we, as makers advocate, recognize, and reject the notion that creativity is a natural gift that some people have and others do not have.

I found that makers almost seem to dismiss the idea that their creativity is important. As they develop, I think makers shift perspectives regarding creativity. Makers typically hear the refrain, “you’re so creative.” Makers reframe this perspective and recognize that creativity stems from finding ideas in the world and attempting them on their own. I suspect that makers view creativity as a byproduct of creating which renders it somewhat secondary. In this sense, everyone is capable of creativity simply by virtue of creating. Lorraine tended to dismiss the fact that she was creative in conversation, almost taking it as an unimportant matter of fact; however, she noted that her sister, who does not have a making practice “doesn’t feel like she’s very creative.” While none of my participants stated outright that their creativity was a function of creating, I found a subtext in their dismissal of the creativity narrative which leads me to ponder the notion that a group of people actively creating

something may afterwards define themselves as creative which seems to me like a powerful psychological tool.

Makers discussed mitigation strategies to help avoid perfectionist tendencies which can paralyze making practices. The notable mitigation strategy is the concept of process learning. Makers incorporate the belief that error is inherent in process learning and commonly expressed the idea in interviews. Maeve describes her experience with creating a felted wool sweater, “It’s not perfect, but I’m okay with it for my first time trying.” She encountered a series of problems as the colors blended and the wool shrunk at different rates. Maeve embraced the idea that this particular product (felted wool sweater) is the first in a long series of products and is instrumental to the process of learning. Maeve experienced the failures and imperfections in relationship to a lifelong learning process as opposed to experiencing the failure in relationship to one specific product.

The makers I interviewed recognize that learning a new skill requires beginning with simple elements and moving into more complex undertakings. Makers acknowledged that simple learning practices may be the most appropriate course toward learning and will eventually lead to valuable and complex skills. For example, the first quilt that Stavinga made was a simple pieced pattern sandwiched with yarn ties. She laughed as she described how the quilt is falling apart, but also recognized that simple quilt as instrumental in the development of her work. A tied quilt is a simple and easy quilting project which opens the door for more complex projects over time.

My interview participants also had a tendency to view skill as a product. Makers recognized that error is inherent in the learning process and viewed mistakes as an opportunity to learn. While making is a product-oriented undertaking, makers understood

that the process of making is where skill is acquired. Makers further recognized that skill is a product and when the ultimate product failed, makers still felt they had acquired something. In this sense, no labor is without reward. Stavinga's tied quilt became an object of skill acquisition as opposed to simply a failed quilt. When I asked Maeve about how she learned new yarn techniques, she responded, "usually, it's just because I've screwed up somewhere."

Making practices are a trial and error based learning system which inherently values error. Edward Thorndike (1898) studied trial and error learning experimentally and concluded that learning was reinforced by positive outcomes as is described in his law of effect. According to the law of effect, When the response to a situation is followed by a reward, the situation will become habit forming. When the response to a situation is followed by an annoyance, the connection will be weakened" (Myers, 2013). Of course, as is the case with Maeve's knitting or Stavinga's tied quilt, learning is the result of analyzing error. An alternative mode of problem solving or learning is to use an insight and theory method of analysis (Olson, 2009). A trial and error based pedagogy requires a doing event followed by an analysis of error event in order to induce learning.

Finally, an important element of maker development is the growth of confidence in a maker's ability to achieve goals beyond their current skill level. Makers begin to think of themselves as capable. They willingly accept that they could accomplish a task that others have accomplished. This idea is articulated in the expression I heard from my Dad a thousand times as I grew up, "You know damn good and well if they can do it, we can."

This attribute also emerged during my interview with Lorraine, "I had dyslexia, so in school when everybody else got to have their electives, I was in dyslexic program classes, so I never really got to do much of that." Lorraine went on to explain how she found her craft

practice through a friend and mentor. She said, “I take a lot of pride in my craft and I never felt like a very smart person – I’m not book smart at all and so that’s what I have is my craft.” That is when Lorraine told me, through tears, that her craft is where she shines. Lorraine developed a confidence in her abilities that was really crushed by her educational experience. Later, I asked Lorraine about practices that she hoped to learn and how she might go about that process. She mentioned wanting to learn to quilt so that she could finish a quilt pieced by her grandmother. She mentioned possibly taking a class at the John C. Campbell School. I asked her how she felt about starting out to learn something new and she said, “I just haven’t acquired that skill yet.” She spoke with total confidence that she would be able to learn how to quilt and that she would be successful once she decided to learn. I attributed this supreme confidence in her abilities to her experiences as a maker, and certainly not to her educational experiences, which if anything, crippled her confidence.

**Maker Development.** Throughout the interview process, I began to recognize some developmental markers among makers. For example, makers experience a developmental shift in which they go from thinking about projects in which they purchase specific supplies for specific projects, to being a maker in which they buy supplies in general, without a specific project in mind. When asked if she purchased fabric for specific projects, Stavinga responded in exasperation,

I used to! I’ve been quilting for just over three and a half years and I think only in the last year, I started buying [fabric] without projects in mind. I just kept seeing more and more fabric that I liked, but I didn’t have a quilt in mind, so my fabric stash has grown and grown.



Additionally, there are environmental elements that seem to benefit the emerging maker. Not surprisingly, abundant resources are valuable and important. Well executed plans that result in high success rate projects with actual aesthetic or useful value are important for early projects. Quality supplies, access to instructional materials, and space are important aspects of being a maker. Paradoxically, material anxiety may impede a maker's process. Material paralysis is common among makers. When faced with valuable, rare, or hard to come by materials, makers are sometimes rendered paralyzed for fear of misusing items that cannot be replaced. Ideally, material supplies for the emerging maker would be abundant in a few categories as opposed to an entire room of one-offs. Makers need the materials to experiment and to engage error. Rare or uncommon materials are not conducive to error which is critical for the emerging maker.

Childhood craft practice and accomplishment were important for my participants. They attributed their early successes as giving them the courage to attempt making things in unknown areas with which they had no prior experience, a skill which likely transfers into other areas of their lives. Lorraine discussed spending time with her grandmother every summer until she was 14 years old. Each time she visited, her grandmother had laid out a different craft for her. When I asked how she felt this experience shaped her as a person, she said, "It just taught me to jump in." Having spent her youth experimenting with materials gave Lorraine courage in adulthood to attempt new projects. Lorraine describes a successful early attempt at making with her grandmother,

She had a collection of buttons and they were from her mother and just some that she had found from over the years. We had made a dress out of a long shirt, I sewed all these buttons onto it, and I sewed a little waistband into it to make it into a dress. I

was so proud. I wore it all the time. I wore it to school. I was probably 7 or 8. [I was so] proud because it was something that she and I had made together and I had sewn the buttons individually myself after she taught me how. I was very proud of that dress.

Participants reported a strong sense of pride and accomplishment associated with total independence in reference to early projects, Lorraine went on to reminisce about the dress she made “I did it entirely by myself, without any help from anyone.” My participants credited these early, independent successes with giving them the courage to attempt many later projects. Stavinga strongly encourages beginning quilters to take a quilting class and reiterates the importance of being successful from the beginning.

One potentially harmful narrative I uncovered is what I refer to as the Martha Stewart Labor Mirage. It is the *this old thing* equivalent of being a maker which implies that a product required virtually no effort and that there is no learning curve to creating it. In reality, makers do not just whip things up like a Genie in a bottle, but instead, a viable product often takes many hours and is followed by extensive practice in addition to unsuccessful attempts in which the maker makes a series of different errors. Maeve’s vintage knitting bags are a good example of the development of a product. Maeve created a series of bags attempting to solve various problems along the way. Each new bag created new problems to solve, until finally, Maeve arrived at a bag that is not perfect, but which satisfies her as a maker; however, when Maeve shows the finished product, she does not have cause or opportunity to explain the minutiae of her process. I was surprised to find that when Maeve began telling me about her master’s degree in biochemistry, she discussed at length the hard work implemented in writing her master’s thesis. With no prodding whatsoever,

Maeve openly explained how hard she had worked and what she had overcome in order to get the degree. She easily recognized the labor involved and made no effort to dismiss it as unimportant. I began to wonder if makers tend to diminish the value of the labor put forth in other making areas (knitting for example).

One possible explanation for the shift in described labor may be a result of making practices which are perceived as relaxing. For example, in a study of 159 males and 181 females, women not only perceived cultural hobbies such as sewing and knitting as stress reducing, but also as more stress reducing than social interventions or outdoor-active sports (Caltabiano, 1994). Describing an activity as both labor-intensive and relaxing may create some level of cognitive dissonance for makers. While we may experience the pains of development as we master the skills involved in knitting, we may also receive a biopsychological benefit that diminishes the perception of labor involved in knitting, such as the benefits described in effort driven rewards theory (Lambert, 2008), behavioral activation therapy (Martell & Dimidjian, 2010), and expressive arts therapy (Knill et al., 2005). This research helped me understand that it might be important for makers to recognize the effort involved in taking up making practices. In fact, Lambert's (2006) research suggests that the effort is the fundamentally beneficial aspect of the experience. Stereotypically diminishing the labor involved in making something serves to exclude others from the arena of making and undermines the value of the experience for makers. The lesson here for makers is to avoid downplaying the work involved in a project.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter established narrative themes which emerged during my interviews and in the online questionnaire. Further, I addressed the relationship between education and making

practices which surfaced for my participants. The narrative analysis surrounding issues which contributed to subjective well-being included the well-being narrative, essence narratives, appreciation narratives, addiction narrative, and the artist narrative. In relationship to economics, I discussed the economic narrative, the gender narrative, the gifting narrative, and the just-in-case narrative.

In relationship to education, I discussed the educational experiences of my participants through two modes of learning, including the culture commons (intergenerational knowledge and informal educational settings) and autodidactic learning. I also discuss the common learning characteristics and development of makers which may contribute to the development of a poietic or maker-based curriculum. The implications of these findings are discussed in Chapter 5.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions**

The purpose of this study was to explore the intersections of well-being, economics and education with respect to daily making practices. This research project teases out the justification narratives employed by makers and analyzes those practices through the lenses of well-being and economics. Further the study explores the relationship of the daily making practices to institutions of education and modes of learning or ways of knowing.

This study contributes a transdisciplinary theory that making practices are an extension of human well-being and contributes to a theoretical understanding of human art and craft production practice. Further, this study explores the relationship between making practices and education which may contribute to a theory of maker-based curriculum development along with a poietic educational aesthetic.

### **Addressing the Research Questions**

The research questions address the relationship of making practices with respect to well-being, economics and education. The research questions that guided this work were: How do making practices contribute to well-being? What are the complexities of engaging in making practices, especially with respect to discursive sociocultural narratives and the economic metanarrative? What are the perceptions held by makers about the role education has had or continues to have on their practices and beliefs related to art, craft, and making? This research contributes a socio-discursive body of knowledge surrounding these domains.

### Craftonomics Theory

This research was filtered through the lens of craftonomics theory which suggests that human production practices are an extension of human well-being and that those practices are complicated by economics. As I explored and analyzed the narratives that makers used to both justify and honor their practices, I found mitigation strategies. When faced with economic disincentivization, makers often found ways to continue their practices and overcome the cognitive dissonance introduced by the economic metanarrative. I revised the craftonomics theory to reflect the way makers negotiate their practices and identities.

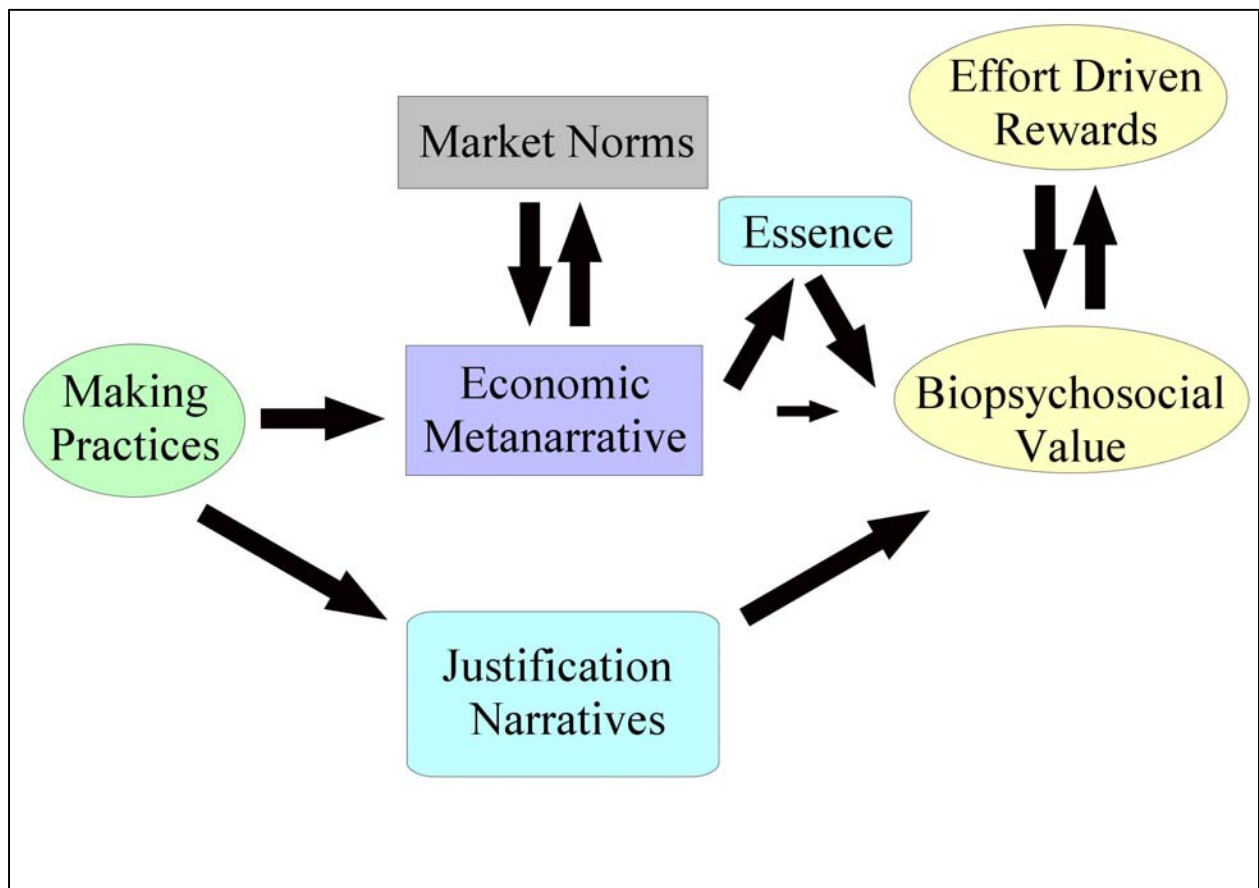


Figure 10. Craftonomics theory revised.

The justification narratives are a form of maker agency which enables makers to flourish within the economic metanarrative. As I reflect on the experiences with my

participants, I realize they're not victims. They are each active producers of the goods in their lives and lives of those who surround them. They are vibrant makers reaping the many benefits of a making practice while living in a complex economic paradigm.

**Well-being & Economics.** These research findings support the craftonomics theory which suggests that human production practices are an extension of human well-being. After developing the craftonomics theory, I postulated that a narrative shift among makers would be beneficial to their well-being. If makers could resist the urge to commodify their practices, I felt they would be able to embrace the well-being narrative and perhaps stop focusing on the material resource and time they devoted to their practices. I have chosen to discuss the implications for the well-being question and the economics question as one, as I have discovered how truly inseparable they are. I have found over and over that it is impossible to remove economics from our lives; however, it is quite possible to mitigate the negative aspects embedded within the economic metanarrative, and in fact, justification narratives do just that.

During this research project, I created art in an effort to better understand the nature of my questions and findings. I chose to work with layers as I was keenly aware of the multiplicity of my project. The first layered series I created was four landscapes based on photos by Trey Ratcliff licensed through the creative commons. I chose images of trees with no leaves and placed leaves on them by cutting apart dollar bills and layering them with hardened resin (Figure 11). The fragments of dollars appear as leaves from a distance and only when you get close do you realize that they are indeed dollars. Of course, this project was a form of resistance, a residual anger at an economic metanarrative which constantly overshadows and interrupts the making practice that I find so fundamental to my own well-

being. But I also found that it was more. I found, during the process of creating the pieces that it was very difficult, if not impossible to keep the money where I wanted it to be. The liquid resin tended to push the pieces out of the boundaries of the tree line and sometimes over edge of the canvas. I also found that the pieces of money were sometimes curled and would stick up above the layers of resin, regardless of how many layers of resin I added. I never got a smooth finish. Finally, I found beauty in the money. It made me wonder if I had overlooked the potential for economics to contribute positively in my making practice. It is when I first began to think about the potential for trying to salvage social value when selling the items makers create. It actually led me to purchase the web domain [becauseequalitymatters.com](http://becauseequalitymatters.com). I began making bags and items emblazoned with equal signs and donating the proceeds to the Human Rights Campaign. Perhaps economics has a place in my making practice after all.



*Figure 11. Economic landscape.*



The second piece of art I made in an effort to explore the interrelationship between economics and well-being, I used an ancient art technique called encaustic in which artists paint with wax and other mediums. I used bees wax, acrylic paints, and other found materials to explore my subject (Figure 12).



*Figure 12. Apitherapy.*

I applied beeswax in layers with paint and other materials. I heated each layer with a propane torch to fuse the wax. I included remnants of my interviews, pieces of money, and sewing materials in with the wax. The most powerful part of this process for me was when a piece of money or a phrase would become obscured by the wax and after adding another coat, the propane torch would reveal it once again. The landscape constantly shifts. In one instance, the phrase “grandmotherly classes” emerged out of the wax like magic and I had no idea it was there. Even now, I could take a blowtorch to this piece and it would change again, covering and uncovering pieces of this dynamic research project. This piece helped me understand that I cannot really talk about well-being without also talking about economics. I realized that both of those forces are powerfully at work in the lives of all makers and that it is vital to come to an understanding of how they act on our lives. It is not a matter of reframing the world or shifting narratives so much as understanding the narratives at play in our lives.

As makers explore and understand the justification narratives involved in overcoming economic disincentivization, they become increasingly empowered to utilize those narratives. Further, they become more aware of the over-arching economic metanarrative which enables them to more easily subvert it, should they choose to do so. This research project creates a poststructural avenue of understanding the grand narratives at play in our lives and has the potential to improve the quality of our lives by increasing our agency as makers.

**Education.** The educational implications of this research suggest subtle paradigm shifts in the way we think about becoming educated. The skills acquired by makers are likely transferable to other areas of a maker’s life many of which would benefit learners in all areas of knowledge acquisition. These are characteristics such as determination, acceptance

of a learning curve, faith that labor is fruitful, willingness to build on the work of others, mitigation of perfectionist tendencies, moving from simple to complex, and a tendency to view skill or learning as a product. These maker characteristics work in concert with the dispositions Eisner (2002) found artists experience including, flexibility, learning to attend to relationships, the ability to shift direction, expression, and imagination. Hetland et al. (2007) further developed this analysis of what the arts have to teach and found eight fundamental dispositions including observation, envisioning, reflecting, expressing, exploring, engaging, persisting, and understanding the art world. My findings bear some resemblance to the work by Eisner (2002) and Hetland and colleagues (2007). I have explored the learning process from the perspective of makers, which is a broader classification than the term artist used by Eisner (2002) and Hetland et al. (2007). I have found the distinction is important with respect to the idea of talent.

The myth of talent is prevalent in the economic metanarrative (Gladwell, 2002). It works to reinforce the consumer model in which most people do not become active producers of the goods in their lives. In the course of becoming educated, the “freedom [to creatively express ourselves via art-making] is restricted for the majority of people as the identification of ‘talent’ tends to overshadow universal participation” (McNiff, 1998, p.1). As students move through the arts in education, some are often singled out as “talented.” The post-18th century notion that artists are uniquely and spiritually called to be artists creates an environment in which a special few enter the arena of artist (Shiner, 2001). It is terribly unfortunate given the many attributes one develops when regularly engaging art (Eisner, 2002; Hetland et al., 2007). Surely the ability to observe, envision or reflect as Hetland et al. (2007) found, or the propensity toward flexibility or attending to relationships which Eisner

(2002) found are critically important ways of thinking for students and adults who attempt to solve complex problems in the world. I see the maker movement as a way around the exclusivity of the artist paradigm, a way to counter the myth of talent, in which one person is more naturally suited to make art than another.

Expressive arts therapy is one of the areas in which art is democratically engaged. One of the hallmarks of theory in expressive arts is that “a person’s license to create is irrevocable, and it opens to every corner of daily life” (McNiff, 1998, p. 1). In fact, as students and clients enter expressive arts settings, practitioners focus on the notion that the arts belong to everyone. The very first sentence in the *Sourcebook in Expressive Arts Therapy* is, “the arts belong together and they belong to all of us, in the service of life and well-being” (Atkins & Williams, 2007, p. 1). The maker philosophy and the expressive arts therapy philosophy have much in common. Both philosophies seek to improve the quality of life for practitioners and both whole-heartedly support an open access model in which everyone can take part, where everyone is a maker and an artist.

The literature review supposed this research would encourage the presence of arts curriculum in public school systems and policy and pointed to the lack of skill acquisition via declining arts and crafts education as a major barrier to making practice. The research findings complicate the issue of arts in public education. Overall, I find that an educational narrative shift might be valuable. The research does not necessarily suppose that art should be more strongly featured in schools as a subject, but more so that we should use the strategies employed when learning art to learn more traditional subjects via arts-based or making-based curriculums, a poietic educational aesthetic. Poietic educational programs already exist in maker spaces or hacker spaces across the country, and occasionally in

schools and policy. For example, the maker movement is being utilized in the “Educate to Innovate” White House campaign aimed at improving STEM education (Samtani, 2014). School and public libraries are creating maker spaces for students and some high schools have had active maker spaces for up to five years (Samtani, 2014). A poietic educational aesthetic moves beyond simple vocational or economic aims into the arena of well-being. We place students on the path to becoming lifelong learners with this model of education. Students become lifelong learners who never arrive at full development and who never master things, but instead seek to always continue learning more. Incorporating maker based learning into public school settings creates an environment in which students can achieve real accomplishment, be introduced to autodidactic learning and build resilience to help overcome depression and anxiety.

One huge advantage to the incorporation of maker spaces in school systems is the contribution that making practices have for well-being. This is the expressive arts message that all arts work in the service of life and well-being (Atkins & Williams, 2007). In the United States, suicide is among the three highest causes of death for those aged 15-44 and is the second highest cause of death for those aged 10-24 (World Health Organization, 2014). We know that “mental disorders (particularly depression disorders) are a major risk factor for suicide” in North America (World Health Organization, 2014). As educators, we have a moral responsibility, a moral imperative to do everything we can to help prevent depression among our students. This research shows that depression mitigation is one of the potential outcomes of becoming a maker.

One of the heartbreaking aspects of this research for me was the realization that maker’s miss out on some of the benefits of their practices. I realized that makers are often

giving away the fruits of their labors and losing the opportunity to reap the benefits of the compound interest of gratification and psychological capital. I think a similar missed opportunity emerges in schooling. Educational settings are ripe for maker spaces. Often students are singled out for special programs, labeled academically gifted and sent to rooms with resources and supplies to create projects. It's unfortunate that all students don't have that benefit. It brings me back to Lorraine's experience with dyslexia. It was the only time in my interviews when a participant broke down in tears. She wasn't crying because she was dyslexic, but instead because being a maker had offered her an opportunity to shine. Lorraine's dyslexia prevented her from experiencing many extracurricular activities. Maker spaces should be available to all students, not just a special few as an extracurricular. The learning skills developed and the psychological resilience we build as makers are critical to the human experience and should be fundamental aspects of our educational environment. I created poietic curricular assignments for both a K12 classroom setting and for a higher education classroom setting in an effort to understand how poietic curriculum might function. I implemented both assignments in school settings. While a critical eye toward educational goals and settings is warranted in light of this research, I was surprised at the ease of implementing these curricular elements.

***K12 poietic curriculum vignette.*** In an effort to better understand how poietic assignments might fit into a K12 curriculum, I created a poietic assignment and carried it out in a second grade classroom. I asked the teacher to visit the room for one hour and a half session to work with the students. I entered my daughter's second grade classroom as a parent and an educator. I led the students in a story telling workshop in which I gave them prompts and asked for responses. The prompts included setting, character development and

story line arc elements. I recorded the audio so that I could later transcribe the story. Many years teaching literature helped me create and deliver this assignment. The students chose an ocean habitat and created a story about a family of sharks living in a town called Shark Worldton. They included details about the school and where the parents worked. When prompted with the line “and then something terrible happened...” the students created a story about a pet catfish that had run away from the Shark family. The remainder of the story involves animals in the community looking for the pet catfish that turns out to have been locked in the bathroom the entire time. It also turns out that the baby shark knew where the pet catfish was but didn’t speak up. The story has a moral in that respect.

After 30 minutes of creating the story, I lead a story board workshop in which we listed the major events in the story and decided what images we would need to depict those events. Next we assigned a section of the story board to each student. They sat and drew the images for the book. I took the drawings home and scanned them into my computer. I added color to the images and then matched the images to the story transcription. I uploaded the book to a publishing website and ordered copies of the book for myself and the classroom. The image in Figure 13 depicts the front cover of the book and a few of the internal pages.

This project is different from a typical class project in several ways. For example, the shark father in the family works at a laundry mat because the father of one of the boys in the class worked at a laundry mat. This book and story relates directly to the students who created it. This is a high skill activity with a very valuable product; however, the students needed no special skills or preparation to move into the project. The student’s names, drawings, and story elements are highly visible which creates a sense of ownership and

accomplishment for the students. Finally, the students re-visit the fruits of their labor often as the book resides on the classroom reading shelf. I occasionally encounter some of the students who refer to themselves as published authors. I will admit that this project required a lot of uncertainty on my part. I did not know, upon entering the classroom, that we would be able to produce a book this beautiful. I'm so glad I suspended my disbelief and forged in to the unknown with this group of students and after having completed the book, I am confident not only that I could reproduce this activity with other students, but also that I could teach this methodology to other educators as well. My only regret is that I didn't have the funds to purchase a copy of this book for each student in the class.



Figure 13. The case of the missing catfish.

**Higher education poietic curriculum vignette.** I had been teaching college freshman for more than a decade when I first began to think about their susceptibility to depression. I



had a student who wrote an essay about the prevalence of depression among freshman at four year Universities. I had encouraged my students to write in service of how they might live, to explore issues that plague their lives. I was completely blown away with the depression statistics for the students I had spent more than a decade teaching. I had come to think of college freshman as a group of people who had very little demands on them, who enjoyed freedom, and who experienced little stress or depression. Upon exploration, I began to realize not only how very wrong I was, but also I began to wonder if I might be complicit in the overwhelming depression statistics of the students I taught. In a nationwide study, 43% of college students reported feeling so depressed that it was difficult for them to study (American College Health Association, 2009). Knowing that the development of depressive symptoms among college freshman might significantly impact their ability to successfully complete academic requirements, I decided to try to introduce making practices to my freshman in an effort toward creating a more resilient classroom population.

I designed a one-semester poietic curriculum to fit within a freshman composition course. I asked students to adopt a making practice for the entire semester and use making practices for the focus of their essays. I asked students to write a making practice personal narrative, a making practice error analysis and a research essay about the making practice they adopted for the semester. We engaged a maker faire in which students performed their practice or displayed the fruits of their labor.

One student took the opportunity to re-build a motorcycle with his dad. He was an ex-marine who had returned to school after serving four years overseas. A close friend had died during his absence and left behind an unfinished restoration. The student and his father used the assignment to finish the motorcycle. They emblazoned the gas tank with a

memorial to their friend. I had another student who created a scrapbook themed with love poetry. The scrapbook was divided into three sections: lost love, new love, and lasting love. Like many college relationships, she and her long time boyfriend had broken up. She spoke of the scrapbook as a way of healing. She said that creating the scrapbook helped her remember the good times she'd had with her former boyfriend and gave her hope about the relationships that she might find in the future. The scrapbook was a profoundly therapeutic experience for her and I wonder how she might have fared without it. Other students took up knitting, painting, crochet, baking, wood working, or learned to play a musical instrument. Many of the students indicated they planned to continue with the making practice throughout their college careers and beyond.

### **Future Research**

This research project begins a conversation and opens many new questions and may extend into many different areas in the future. I interviewed female makers and, upon witnessing the many benefits of being a maker, I recognize there is work to be done among men. It would be interesting to examine the gender differences with respect to well-being and economics. Further, I recognize that I inadvertently created an economic bubble. The women I interviewed all happen to have partners who are the financial breadwinners for their domestic unions. It would be interesting to explore the economic aspect of makers who are totally financially independent through in-depth interviews. For example, I would like to see additional research conducted to analyze whether members of the traditional workforce have an easier time delineating between work hours and “me” hours in the “always on” world of digital technology. I wonder if that demographic might more easily engage maker culture without the pressure of being productive in an economic way. Additionally, I would like to

see research conducted around the self-preservation making narrative which is marked by a desire to create skills that will protect makers and their families in the event of catastrophic societal disruption. I wonder if this psychological disposition is related to having experienced resource deficit as that notion did emerge during the interviews. Further research in this area would be interesting.

Finally, the area in which I would most like to see additional research is related to the well-being of physically disabled populations. Lambert's (2008) effort driven rewards theory in which using our hands in meaningful and productive ways contributes to psychological wellness begs the question, what of those who cannot use their hands? I wonder, based on personal experiences, whether watching a person use their hands, imagining the use of our own hands, or telling a person how to use their hands might have some impact on the well-being of those populations. Neuroscientists have determined that "anticipating something pleasurable creates more activity in pleasure center of the brain than actually achieving the goal" (Lambert, 2008, p. 30). I wonder if there might be a cognitive form of behavioral activation therapy to be utilized among disabled members of the population for depression mitigation.

## **Conclusions**

Conducting this research has enabled me to be a more peaceful maker. I wrestled so uncomfortably with the urge to commodify my making practice and so resented the urge to recover my costs. I still wrestle with the economics of my practice, but recognizing how my making practice interacts with economics and being keenly aware of the many advantages and benefits I experience as a result of a making practice improves the quality of my

experience. I hope that this project might do the same for others and that we might all rest more easily in our making.

I am also excited by the possibilities of introducing making practices into educational settings. I am hopeful that this research will help create avenues for the development of more poietic curriculum in school settings. The experience of creating the book in the second grade classroom was a lot of work for me, but it was deeply rewarding work for both me and the students. I believe students and teachers are hungry for assignments that include poietic knowledge and making practices. Even subtle shifts in educational practices can lead to greater resilience in students and teachers and I hope that educational leaders will pay closer attention to the types of curriculum we use in classroom settings.

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## Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Approval

From: IRB <[irb@appstate.edu](mailto:irb@appstate.edu)>  
Date: Wed, Aug 1, 2012 at 2:19 PM  
Subject: IRB Notice  
To: [millerec@email.appstate.edu](mailto:millerec@email.appstate.edu)

**To:** Emily Miller  
Leadership & Educational Studies, Les  
CAMPUS MAIL

**From:** Robin Tyndall, Institutional Review Board  
**Date:** 8/01/2012  
**RE:** Notice of IRB Exemption  
**Study #:** 13-0013

**Study Title:** Craftonomics: Homo Aestheticus, Homo Economicus, and Poiesis  
**Exemption Category:** (2) Anonymous Educational Tests; Surveys, Interviews or Observations

This submission has been reviewed by the IRB Office and was determined to be exempt from further review according to the regulatory category cited above under 45 CFR 46.101(b). Should you change any aspect of the proposal, you must contact the IRB before implementing the changes to make sure the exempt status continues to apply. Otherwise, you do not need to request an annual renewal of IRB approval. Please notify the IRB Office when you have completed the study.

Best wishes with your research!

## **Appendix B: Research Lay Summary**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

I am Emily Miller, a doctoral student in Appalachian State University's Educational Leadership Program. For my dissertation research, I am studying craft behaviors among women. I am specifically exploring craft behaviors in relationship to economics, education and social issues.

This invitation requests your participation in this study. This research project explores the value of and barriers to arts and craft behaviors. I hope to begin to understand the invisible structures of arts and crafts culture and how they contribute to or detract from well-being. Specifically, I am exploring the potential barriers to craft behaviors from economic, education and social perspectives. In this research I hope to illuminate the narratives that discourage craft behaviors and put forth an argument toward reinstating arts education in public school systems.

I sincerely hope you will agree to participate in this study. Your identity and the name of your institution will remain confidential. I know you are a very busy woman, and I want to honor your schedule as well as do justice to this issue. I plan to conduct one-on-one, face-to-face interviews for no more than two hours total. We can meet for a couple of extended sessions or for one initial session to be followed by email(s) and/or phone conversation(s). During the interview(s) I would like to audiotape the session(s) so I can accurately record your responses. I will destroy all tape recordings at the conclusion of my research.

I would love to have you take part in this important work on craft behaviors. If you are willing to be a research participant, please complete the demographic information sheet attached.

I appreciate your help in making this study fruitful and look forward to meeting and working with you.

Thank you,

Emily Miller

## **Appendix C: Consent to Participate in Research**

Information to Consider About this Research

8/3/2012

### **Craftonomics: Homo Aestheticus, Homo Economicus, and Poiesis**

Principal Investigator: Emily Miller

Department: Educational Leadership

Contact Information: Principal Investigator – Emily Miller  
810 Chesterfield Cir SW  
Lenoir, NC 28645  
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[millerec@appstate.edu](mailto:millerec@appstate.edu)

Faculty Advisor – Kelly Clark/Keefe  
RCOE – Boone, NC  
828 262 7508  
[clarkkeefeka@appstate.edu](mailto:clarkkeefeka@appstate.edu)

#### **What is the purpose of this research?**

You are being invited to take part in a research study about the value of and barriers to arts and craft behaviors. I hope to begin to understand the invisible structures of arts and crafts culture and how they contribute to or detract from well-being. Specifically, I am exploring the potential barriers to craft behaviors from economic, educational and social perspectives. In this research I hope to illuminate the narratives that discourage craft behaviors and put forth an argument toward reinstating arts education in public school systems.

#### **What will I be asked to do?**

You will be asked to answer questions about your experiences as an artist/crafter. Your identity will remain confidential. I know you are very busy, and I want to honor your schedule as well as do justice to this issue. I plan to conduct one-on-one, face-to-face

interviews for no more than two hours total. We can meet for a couple of extended sessions or for one initial session to be followed by email(s) and/or phone conversation(s). During the interview(s) I would like to audiotape the session(s) so I can accurately record your responses. I will destroy all tape recordings at the conclusion of my research.

The research procedures will be conducted in a setting convenient for the interviewee and/or via online questionnaire. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is (2-3) hours over the next 6 months.

This study explores the craft behaviors of women between the ages of 18 and 50. You should not volunteer for this study if you are a male or if you are not between the ages of 18 and 50.

**What are the possible benefits of this research?**

There may be no personal benefit from your participation but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.

This study should help me learn about and strategize ways of overcoming the barriers to beneficial behaviors.

**Will I be paid for taking part in the research?**

I will not pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

**How will you keep my private information confidential?**

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write up the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information. You will not be identified in any published or presented materials.

I will make every effort to prevent anyone from knowing that you gave us information or what that information is.



Transcripts and recordings of participant data will be kept in password protected computer files at all times. Participant privacy will be protected and identifying information will be removed from all data and publications. Further, I will destroy all tape recordings at the conclusion of my research.

**Who can I contact if I have questions?**

I will be available to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact me, the Principal Investigator at 828-201-3002, or my advisor, Dr. Kelly Clark/Keefe at 828-262-7508. If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, contact the Appalachian Institutional Review Board Administrator at 828-262-2130 (days), through email at [irb@appstate.edu](mailto:irb@appstate.edu) or at Appalachian State University, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, IRB Administrator, Boone, NC 28608.

**Do I have to participate? What else should I know?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you choose not to volunteer, there will be no penalty and you will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have. If you decide to take part in the study you still have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to continue. There will be no penalty and no loss of benefits or rights if you decide at any time to stop participating in the study.

Sometimes the researchers may determine that your participation is no longer needed. I will notify you if you should no longer participate in this study.

The ASU Institutional Review has determined that this study is exempt from IRB oversight.

**I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?**

The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should indicate your agreement:

- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
- I understand that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- I understand I am not giving up any of my rights.
- I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

**Appendix D: Demographic Information Sheet**

The information in this section will only be used to categorize and speak about artists and crafters in general. No identifying information such as your name or your institution's name will be used in any part/report in this study. Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained during and after the completion of this project.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Degree/Years of Schooling: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship Status: \_\_\_\_\_

Art/Craft Discipline(s):

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### **Appendix E: Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

1. How does art/craft practice contribute to your well-being or happiness?
2. Tell me about something you made that was a success. How do you feel about that experience?
3. Tell me about something you made that was a failure. How do you feel about that experience?
4. Tell me about a time when you sold or considered selling something you'd made. How do you feel about that experience?
5. Tell me about your educational experiences with arts and crafts. How does your education contribute to your art or craft practice?
6. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your craft experience?

## **Appendix F: Online Survey Questions**

Research Lay Summary

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Participation is Voluntary

1. Demographic Information Sheet

2. Which of the following describes your current occupation?

3. Which category below includes your age?

4. What is your gender?

5. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

6. What is your relationship status?

7. What art and craft disciplines do you practice?

8. Please provide a link to your online blog or website.

9. How does your art/craft practice contribute to your well-being or happiness?

10. Please provide a specific example about how art or craft practice has contributed to your well-being. I am looking for a specific story.

11. Tell me about a time when you sold or considered selling something you'd made. How do you feel about that experience?

12. How do you justify the resources (money, time, materials) you spend making things?

13. Tell me about your educational experiences with arts and crafts. How does your formal education contribute to your art or craft practice? How do you learn about new practices?

14. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your art/craft practice?

15. Thank you for participating in this survey!

## **VITA**

Emily Caroline Miller was born in Statesville, North Carolina on August 24, 1976. She graduated summa cum laude with Bachelor of Arts degrees English and Psychology with a concentration in creative writing in 1997. In 2003, she graduated summa cum laude with a Master of Arts degree in English Education with an emphasis on community, junior and technical college teaching. Emily spent more than a decade teaching in community colleges and universities and co-edited a book on the fifty states community college systems.

In 2004, Emily ventured into the private sector where she worked in a corporate environment as a production manager and systems coordinator. Emily earned the Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and the graduate certificate in Expressive Arts Therapy at Appalachian State University in May 2014.